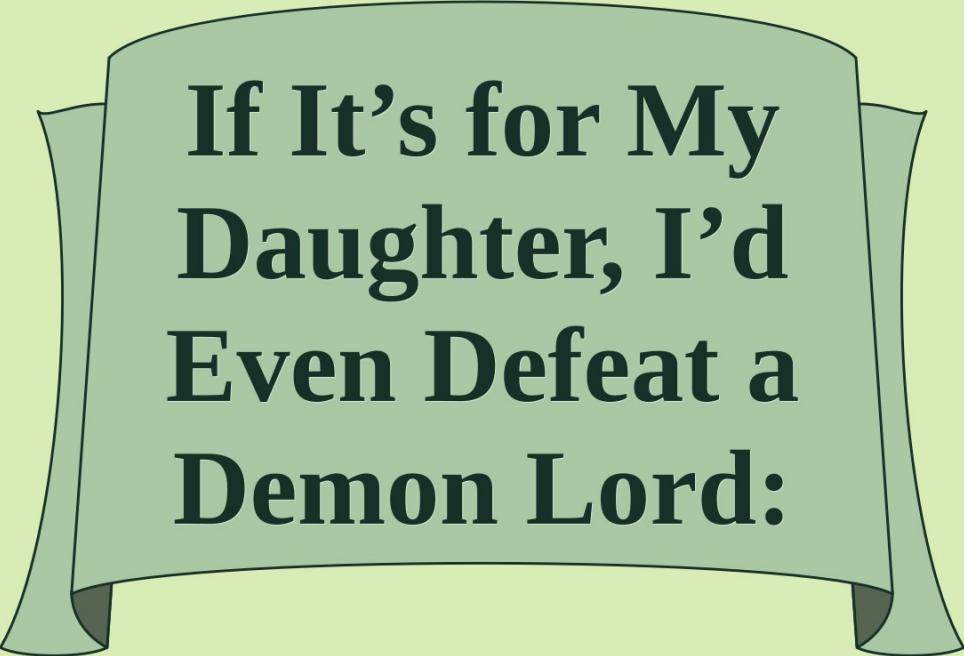




**If It's for My
Daughter, I'd
Even Defeat a
Demon Lord:**

CHIROLU

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
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*If It's for My Daughter,
I'd Even Defeat
a Demon Lord* 6

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Illustrator: Kei



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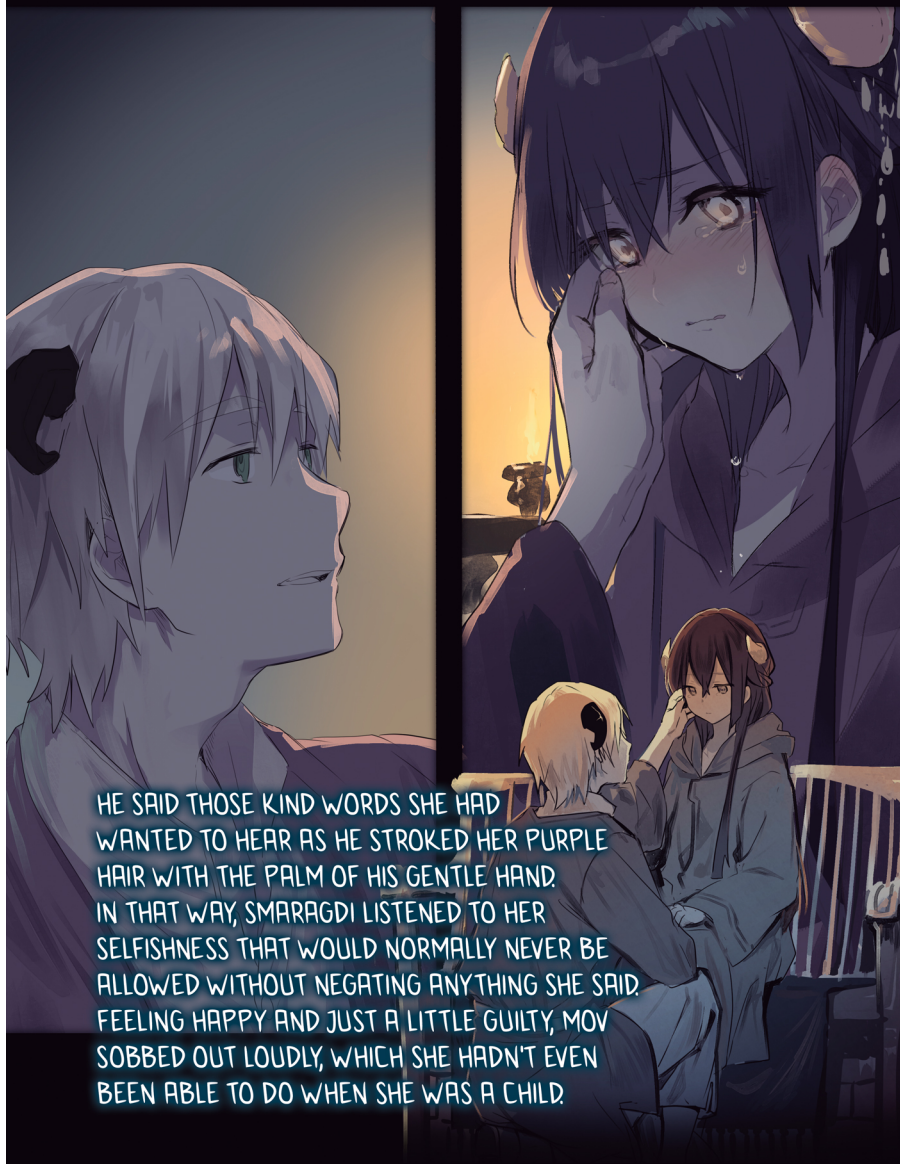


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CHRYSOS GAVE A
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IT WAS A
GENTLE,
HAPPY TIME
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HE SAID THOSE KIND WORDS SHE HAD WANTED TO HEAR AS HE STROKED HER PURPLE HAIR WITH THE PALM OF HIS GENTLE HAND. IN THAT WAY, SMARAGDI LISTENED TO HER SELFISHNESS THAT WOULD NORMALLY NEVER BE ALLOWED WITHOUT NEGATING ANYTHING SHE SAID. FEELING HAPPY AND JUST A LITTLE GUILTY, MOV SOBBED OUT LOUDLY, WHICH SHE HADN'T EVEN BEEN ABLE TO DO WHEN SHE WAS A CHILD.

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1: The Platinum-haired Maiden Reflects on the Past

They were kind, so they chose to pretend not to see. It wasn't just Dale, as Chrysos was also very kind and pampered her. They said she didn't need to know anything. Just having her back was enough to make them break out in satisfied smiles. That was undoubtedly how they truly felt.

Even so, Latina was unable to make the decision to leave things unknown.

†

“Platina... Platina.”

It took her a bit to realize she was being called. Looking up, Latina saw Chrysos sitting next to her, looking concerned.

“Chrysos...?”

“It would seem that you truly should not yet be pushing yourself. Let us end things here for today, so that you may take your time and relax,” Chrysos said.

Hearing those words, Latina realized that gaps had started appearing in the conversation between Dale, Rose, and Sylvia at some point. She hadn't quite nodded off, but apparently her hazy consciousness had started to drift in and out.

Latina hurriedly forced a smile, and called out in a purposefully bright tone, “Don't worry about me. Just keep on talking. I'll be alright.”

“That won't do.”

“Of course we won't do that.”

The voices of both Chrysos and Dale rang out simultaneously, shutting down her proposal.

Chrysos looked at Dale with a sigh, and in acknowledgment he rose to his feet.

“Dale.”

“It's not as if this is the sort of thing we need to discuss immediately, right?”

“That is correct.”

Latina had used a tone like she was taking Dale to task, but seeing how the overprotective natures of these two were flaring up at the

moment, there had been no way that would work on them. The pair had only just recently been in a battle to the death, but now they seemed strangely in sync.

Dale approached the bench where the twin sisters were seated, and then easily picked up Latina. She settled into his arms so snugly that she wasn't able to even budge an inch, much less try to resist.

Feeling shy in the face of Rose and Helmine's gazes, Latina went red all the way to the tips of her ears. With a frail voice she protested, "I'm fine. I'm really alright, so at least put me down, Dale."

"I won't," Dale said in blunt refusal, then exited the room with long strides. As Chrysos, who was in the highest position in this place, had given her permission, Rose and the others were unable to interject.

Vint and Hagel followed closely behind, their tails wagging along. While thinking that there wasn't even the slightest chance of anything happening to Latina with the most frightful of all heroes and those mythical beasts guarding her, Chrysos gave a sigh and then leaned back into the bench.

Tracing back the path he had taken previously, Dale returned to the royal villa, where the refreshing breeze blew.

He occasionally stole glances at Latina, who wore an expression on her face that fell somewhere between troubled and embarrassed. She had already given up on her utterly futile protests that she was alright, and settled meekly into Dale's arms.

"Are you going to change?" Dale asked, having put Latina down atop the bed in the villa.

"Yeah..." she replied, sounding sleepy. He didn't even know where the clasp was on the delicate hair ornament she wore. Seeing Dale's hesitation, a lady attendant who seemed to have been under orders from Chrysos hurried into the room.

To speak of Dale's true feelings, he didn't want to be separated from Latina even for a moment. But even so, he realized now wasn't the time for a dispute, and yielded Latina to the attendant before leaving the room. Vint lay down at the foot of the bed, looking as if it was only natural to do so. Dale was well aware that though Vint tended to move to the beat of his own drum, he also acted like a faithful dog in many ways. He could trust that mythical beast to guard her more than he could any strong, brawny soldiers he wasn't familiar with.

Hagel was lying down outside, his eyes closed. He opened his eyes just a sliver in response to Dale's presence.

"You have successfully carried out your goal, have you not...?" Hagel asked quietly. With that, Dale realized that after having spent so long running, he could finally stand still.

“...Yeah.”

“What do you intend to do from now on?”

Hagel had been there watching all along as Dale kept on running straight ahead without so much as even glancing aside. The soaring wolf's voice had a tone of relief to it, at the fact that everything was over.

“We're going to take it easy here for a while. Latina's still in no state to be moved. And if I make Latina push herself, I'll probably end up in another battle to the death with Chrysos,” Dale responded, no longer any darkness or harshness to his tone.

Sensing that, Hagel closed his eyes with a look of satisfaction and laid back down.

“I see.”

Dale averted his gaze from Hagel, and then nonchalantly stated, “Thanks for sticking with me...”

Through some means or another, it had been a long partnership between the two of them. The soaring wolf should have understood the reason behind the emotions invested in his blunt statement.

Hagel's response was a simple wag of his tail. Dale was grateful for the brief reply.

With his gaze still averted, Dale saw the sunlight sparkling on the surface of the flowing water. He wondered how long it had been since his heart had been calm enough for him to simply listen to the flow of water.

When the attendant exited the room, Dale once more went inside and approached Latina's side.

Latina had fallen asleep in the bed, and the sound of her sleeping was somehow out of tune, just like always. Her complexion didn't look bad, either, and her breathing wasn't unrestful. Eliminating those potential causes for concern one after another, he then devoted himself to watching over her as she slept.

“Latina.”

He wasn't seeking a response, as he had no intention of interrupting her sleep. Just being able to call her name in this way was enough to make him feel satisfied.

With a gentle smile on his face, Dale sat down in a position where he had a good view of Latina, and gave himself over to the simple joy of letting time slowly slip by.

As she'd been bedridden for a long time, Latina's physical strength had diminished greatly. The fact that she remained able to move about without significant trouble, though, was clear proof that, while imperfect, demon lords were still akin to low-ranking gods.

Latina had broken free of the state she'd been in up until now, wherein she was hardly ever conscious. And yet, Latina still had to be

forced to recuperate. She was left weak, easily fatigued, and in need of frequent rests. As a result, there wasn't a great difference from how things had been up until now, drifting off into naps regardless of whether it was day or night.

Chrysos popped her face in between dealing with government affairs, and Sylvia kept an unchanging smile on her face, but neither of them discussed how things were progressing between Laband and Vassilios. Seeing her sister and friend's intention to let her simply focus on her recovery rather than thinking about anything difficult, Latina didn't ask for any details.

However, Latina was by nature a workaholic. For her, being told to just rest and not being given anything to do was terribly irritating. But even so, she realized it was necessary, so she didn't say anything selfish and kept all those feelings inside. Latina was aware that she couldn't move around well enough at the moment to make such requests.

As she spent that night in slumber as well, Latina stirred in the bed. Opening her eyes a bit, she saw the silk swaying in the night wind, lit ever so slightly by the moonlight. She realized that she'd been sleeping and rolled over.

"Hngh..."

There was a dark silhouette before her now that she'd turned over.

"Dale...?" Latina called out to it, not even needing to guess at the name of the shape's owner.

"Hmm? What is it, Latina? Are you up?"

That kind voice belonged to just the person that Latina had expected. Dale reached out into the darkness without even a hint of hesitation and lit the lamp nearby. As that tiny bit of light illuminated the room, a gentle smile appeared on Dale's face.

"It's dark out...?"

"Well, it is nighttime," Dale responded with a chuckle, then sat Latina up and put a pillow behind her back to support her. He took the glass bottle full of water that was waiting next to the lamp, used it to fill up the accompanying cup, and then brought that to Latina's lips.

With this action that made it seem like she'd caught a cold, Latina's cheeks went so red that it was possible to tell even in this poor light.

"Dale... I can do it myself, you know."

"Come on, don't say that, just drink up. Your voice is all hoarse."

Dale lovingly hovered over her, always by her side, to such a degree that it was almost too much. Latina wasn't at all surprised by the figure at her side and knew who it was precisely because this was how things always were as of late.

As she steadily gulped at the contents of the cup until it was empty, Latina realized that she really had been thirsty. She could see the expression on Dale's face because he'd gotten so close, and it didn't seem to be gloomy at all. But Latina still knitted her brows and said in an uneasy-sounding voice, "You're worrying about me... but it'd be awful if you ended up collapsing in the process. I'm alright, so you need to get some proper rest."

No matter what time Latina awoke, be it day or night, Dale was there by her side. She had no idea when he was eating or sleeping. Because she couldn't keep an eye on him, she couldn't help but worry that he was pushing himself.

Dale smiled in response to her words, and then stroked her hair like one would with a small child.

"I'm resting up properly, too. You don't need to worry."

"But..."

"And anyway, I really do just want to watch you, Latina... If I end up collapsing, then somebody else will end up looking after you, right? I can't let that happen."

As he thought that she really was kind for worrying about him, Dale broke out in a wide grin and kept stroking her hair. As if he'd reverted back to his old self, he was now in full on fawning, doting mode.

Ever since becoming a demon, Dale had been able to stay active with hardly any rest or food. He possessed an abnormal level of stamina, allowing him to even easily keep on swinging his blade, fighting on for three days and nights straight.

Dale was putting those high capabilities to use in a frivolous, regrettable direction, to keep watching over Latina. He was quite literally waiting on her day and night. To Dale as he was now, he was soothed just by the sight of watching Latina sleep. He was at his worst now, where he'd be willing to say he wouldn't be bored in the least just watching her.

After spending so long being serious, the aftereffects proved to be more deplorable than just strong. And Latina, his "master," still hadn't realized that Dale had transformed into a being that completely defied all common sense.

She was able to get up more and more bit by bit, and her time awake became longer than her time asleep without pushing herself, so Latina started leaving the villa for walks. Latina was a bundle of curiosity, but she wasn't allowed outside, so her strolls were kept within the temple. And since she needed to be accompanied by a lady-in-waiting whenever she did so, it was still a rather inconvenient situation for Latina.

However, around that time, Dale started to leave Latina's side for

at least a short time every now and then. He used that time to discuss matters with Chrysos that they couldn't let Latina overhear: They agreed that if a new Demon Lord of Calamity appeared and threatened Latina, the Eighth Demon Lord, they would join together and smash that foe to a bloody pulp. In a way that would never appear officially in the pages of history, the most terrifying of heroes and the First Demon Lord had formed a pact.

And Dale had also used that time to offer information on Laband, now that Vassilios would open relations with the nation. As a noble of Laband, Rose would never say anything which could prove disadvantageous for her own country. She didn't specialize in diplomacy, but she was very prudent and understood her own position. And Chrysos knew the position that Rose was in, too. Her personal fondness for Rose was something she separated fully from her official stance.

On the other hand, Dale wasn't a Laband noble, and didn't want to put Latina's sister, Chrysos, as a disadvantage. And as a result, he included more of the negative aspects than Rose did when discussing the internal affairs of Laband.

When Dale was making one such visit to see Chrysos, Latina sent a lady-in-waiting to call for Rose.

The inside of the villa only had the bare minimum of furnishings. Latina greeted Rose while sitting atop the bed that took up the majority of the room. She urged Rose to take the seat by the side of the bed, where Dale usually sat.

"It would seem Sir Dale is not here today, yes?" Rose said with a smile. It had become the norm as of late for Dale to spend almost all of his time by Latina's side.

"I think he's with Chrysos right now," Latina responded, looking straight at Rose. She wanted to look down in embarrassment, but she held that urge back through her utmost effort.

She felt like she really should have done this sooner. Even so, she'd let herself be indulged by Dale and Chrysos's words, as they said that she didn't need to know anything. Latina was confident that unlike that "doting idiot" and Chrysos with her "sister complex" who treated her like a small child, Rose would be willing to tell her even the things that may hurt her.

However, the thought that putting things off had served to protect her left a sense of painful weight behind, and she placed her hand above her heart.

"Lady Rose, what happened? What... what happened since I left Dale's side...?"

Latina had started to get a vague sense of what had happened while she slept. But at the same time, she also sensed that she had

brought it about, so she couldn't keep on pretending not to notice.

"What did Sir Dale tell you...?"

"Dale won't tell me anything... he said I don't need to worry about anything, and that it's fine... But I also know that's not the case," Latina said, then clenched both hands tight. "Please tell me. What happened?"

Rose sat silently, looking right at Latina. After about a minute of silence, Rose began in a quiet tone, "I am not as informed as you may believe. Uncle or Sir Gregor may know more, but what I am aware of amounts to little more than the rumors you could hear about town."

Rose said that in advance. In personal settings, she referred to Duke Eldstedt affectionately as "Uncle."

Rose also had her misgivings about Dale and Chrysos intentionally not informing Latina of the state of affairs. But in her current standing, it was difficult for her to go against the will of Latina's guardian, Dale, and her sister, the ruler of Vassilios, Chrysos. Therefore, she had leaned more towards taking a wait-and-see approach. But with that said, she hadn't been expressly forbidden, so she had no reason to refuse to grant Latina's request.

"Is that acceptable?"

"Yes."

Hearing Latina's response, Rose once more sat in silence for a bit, thinking about where to start.

"I am not aware of precisely when it was that you left Dale's side. The first time I heard of the matter, Sir Gregor was looking into the fact that Sir Dale had gone missing."

"Huh?"

"Uncle didn't tell me the details of the situation, but since Sir Gregor was worried about Sir Dale, I heard about it."

"Dale... went missing...? What...?"

"I do not know what Sir Dale did at that time. But when Uncle summoned Sir Dale back afterwards to eliminate the Fourth Demon Lord, he was accompanied by the grown soaring wolf known as Hagel."

"The Fourth Demon Lord...?" Latina asked, her voice trembling.

"In Vassilios, they're referred to as the 'Demon Lords of Calamity,' yes? Those demon lords suddenly grew active. Laband fell prey to an attack by the Fourth Demon Lord, and suffered great losses," Rose said, turning pale.

Latina had one question in response: "Why... why was Dale summoned to eliminate a demon lord? No matter how skilled an adventurer he may be..."

"Latina...?" Rose asked, looking surprised at Latina's reaction. She thought about why Latina wouldn't know about that. She couldn't

come up with any reason on the spot, but she sensed that this was one of the things that Dale had intentionally been hiding.

“Sir Dale is someone who was granted several instances of divine protection from the gods of the seven colors. As the antithesis of a demon lord, his blade has the power to strike them down.”

“Huh...?”

“Dale possesses a power that makes him what is known as a ‘hero.’”

“Huh...? Huh?”

Latina looked absolutely befuddled in response to Rose’s words, and then came to understand a moment later, only to become confused once more and break out in a sweat for some reason. Her gaze darted about, never settling down, showing clearly how out of sorts she was at the moment.

“Dale... is a hero?”

“Yes.”

“So... he can defeat demon lords, then...?”

“It still does not become an easy task, but with Sir Dale present, there is at least a possibility of doing so. And so, with him accompanying them, Sir Gregor and the others departed to defeat the demon lords and their demons.”

“So... Dale defeated the Fourth Demon Lord?”

“Yes.”

That wasn’t the whole of Dale’s exploits.

The Demon Lords of Calamity were considered dangerous by nations the world over.

Dale became famed as the “Platinum Hero” through his furious efforts fighting alongside the allied nations in the war against the Seventh Demon Lord, where he fought under the banner of the fairy princess while clad in platinum armor and accompanied by a mythical beast. Rose informed Latina that his fame had now spread throughout the world.

When she furthermore heard that Dale had defeated the Second Demon Lord with the assistance of a “Purple Oracle,” Latina collapsed atop the bed. She was now convinced that Dale was the reason for the terrible state of the space containing the thrones.

I had a feeling... but it really was Dale...

And at the same time, Latina also realized the most important power that Dale possessed.

Latina lay collapsed on the bed for a while, having been completely and utterly overwhelmed by the flow of new information. Though she felt like her eyes were spinning, she finally managed to somehow sit up.

Facing Rose, who wore a look of concern on her face, Latina

uttered earnest words of apology. "I'm sorry, Lady Rose... I was just so surprised..."

"It would seem that Sir Dale truly did not inform you that he possessed the power of a hero... Sir Dale's work for Uncle involved demon lords and their retainers, so I had been certain that you were aware."

"Dale never told me about his work... He said it came from someone important in the nation, so I thought that maybe it involved confidential matters that couldn't be allowed to be leaked..."

Latina didn't even know that Dale's employer was Duke Eldstedt, the prime minister of Laband, until Dale collapsed from illness and she went to the capital. Latina also didn't know Gregor's lineage until that time, so she readily accepted the introduction he had given when they'd previously met.

Her reasoning was also influenced by the effects she had seen her parents' positions leave on them as a child. Her mother, Mov, was the highest-ranking priestess in the nation (in Vassilios, priests and priestesses also oversaw the country's administration). Her father, Smaragdi, was responsible for educating a great many young priests, leaving him in a very influential position as well.

Latina hardly viewed things in the same manner as a typical girl living around town.

"So Dale... defeated the Demon Lords of Calamity, right...?"

"Sir Dale's exploits have become famous the world over.

Currently, the matter surrounding the Second Demon Lord is known only to Uncle and the nation of Vassilios, but the news that Sir Dale was central to the defeat of the Fourth and Seventh Demon Lords has spread abroad to other countries."

"I'm glad... Dale is alright..."

While muttering that, Latina realized that because she was sealed by the demon lords who were part of the natural order rather than killed, her "divine protection" remained with Dale. If the fragment of the gods' miraculous power that was granted to man was called divine protection, then the same should also be true of the power the lower-ranking beings called demon lords granted to their retainers.

Latina had granted Dale something akin to a wish. She wanted him to return safely. Latina was always thinking that she wanted him to be protected from anything and everything, even if it took all of her power. Realizing that she had given him power that was on a whole other level from what demon lords normally granted their retainers, making him into an especially powerful demon, Latina hoped that it was of at least a little help to him, and gave a sigh.

But from the state of those thrones... did Dale defeat demon lords other than the Calamities...?

If Dale was a hero, then he must have soon realized that it wasn't the power of a hero that had harmed her, a demon lord. And she herself was the one who had told Dale that the only one outside of a hero who could harm a demon lord was another of their kind.

Was the reason my seal loosened because it had been shaken by the power of a hero...?

Looking back on her own hazy memories, Latina recalled that by the time she regained consciousness, three of the thrones were already without a master. In all likelihood, the effectiveness of the seal had lessened thanks to nearly half of the demon lords having been defeated.

To start with, the sealing ceremony had been hurriedly carried out with the shared goal of sealing the Eighth Demon Lord. The efforts of an irregular being such as a hero who was also a demon had surely no small effect on it weakening.

"So the Demon Lords of Calamity suddenly grew active?" While still thinking things through, Latina gave voice to her concerns.

"Yes."

"Do you know why?"

Rose, without a sign of frustration, gently explained. "No. However, the Demon Lords of Calamity have always caused harm to those around them, acting according to their own thinking alone. Many explain it as being something akin to a child's tantrum, in which you cannot seek a reason behind their actions."

Hearing Rose's words didn't clear away the gloom on Latina's face.

Was it my fault...? I can't imagine why Dale and Chrysos would not want me to know so badly otherwise...

It was precisely because she had such kind people thinking of her as someone precious that Latina's thoughts wrenched at her heart.

"There were... a lot of victims of the Demon Lords of Calamity... right...?"

And that's not all... Because of me, the demon lords other than the Calamities were also... They didn't do anything, but because of me...

Seeing how terribly pale Latina had grown, Rose gently stroked her back. Latina jumped up with a start, and looked like a child about to break out in tears.

Rose gently took Latina's hand in her own. It was as if the warmth of Rose's heart was gradually being conveyed along with that of her hand. Her kind blue eyes looked at Latina from up close.

"I do not know why you are blaming yourself so much, Latina. Would you like to talk about it?"

Latina opened her mouth a sliver, only to instead hold her tongue and shake her head side to side. Having accepted that reaction as a

possibility, Rose broke out in a slightly strained smile and gripped Latina's hand a bit tighter.

"If you cannot discuss it with me, then how about talking with Sir Dale or Her Majesty, the First Demon Lord? They both surely would like for you to rely on them."

"Lady Rose..." Latina said in a hoarse voice, breaking out in tears at the same time.

Afterwards, Latina indulged in Rose's kindness of not asking anything further, and simply kept on crying.

I'm sure... that just like the prophecy said... I brought a lot of people misfortune...

Latina's feelings of remorse, that she was a sinner and deserved to be treated as such, were so great that the pressure crushing her made it so she couldn't even breathe. Because of such thoughts, in a way, Latina may have actually wanted someone to blame her.

As Latina continued weeping like a child, she realized that someone was looking at her with a terribly quiet gaze. She found herself suddenly stricken by something akin to dread, and began to tremble, her teary eyes turning toward the silent presence.

"Ms. Helmine..." she called out in a hoarse, tiny voice, echoing her own fright.

Rose hadn't brought a single lady-in-waiting with her to Vassilios, so Helmine served that role. Rose wasn't from an especially elite lineage, and she was able to take care of herself in her day to day life, but she was still a noble officially visiting this foreign nation as a representative of Laband. And as Helmine was also serving as her bodyguard, she was always waiting on Rose, at her side.

As a result, there was no reason for Latina to find fault with Helmine quietly waiting in the corner of this royal villa that served as Latina's private room. Even so, though, Latina's cheeks were dyed red with embarrassment at letting Helmine see her sob like a child.

Latina was currently in a weakened state both physically and emotionally, but faced with this person she was so bad at dealing with looking all calm and composed, her natural pride flared back up.

She wiped away the tears reflexively streaming down her face with both hands. Her strong competitive spirit reared its head, not wanting to let this person see her in such a pathetic state.

Helmine looked at Latina with a terribly calm, composed gaze.

Latina just wasn't any good at dealing with this woman.

She was an older woman with an air of composure about her. She was a beauty, with a great many things Latina lacked back when she still hadn't yet become an adult.

Faced with her, Latina felt like she was having the things she was lacking thrust in her face. No matter how much she was aware of that,

having those things shoved in front of her caused Latina's heart to feel heavy. And above all else, Helmine knew a side of Dale that Latina didn't.

Helmine was the one person Latina didn't want to lose to.

With that single-minded purpose, Latina lifted her face and found Helmine wearing a smile that looked somehow cruel.

Rose soon realized the atmosphere crackling between the two of them. Latina wore her feelings on her sleeve, so it was very easy to understand what was going on when she suddenly started acting differently, paying more attention than was necessary to Helmine's gaze.

But Rose didn't say anything, instead deciding to watch over the situation.

Latina was being crushed by her feelings of guilt just moments ago, but now she was no longer even hanging her head, instead meeting Helmine's gaze head-on. Disregarding the reason, it had a large effect on bringing back Latina's liveliness.

"I'd thought that you'd grown quite a bit, but it would still seem you're still just a little lady, huh?"

Those words of Helmine's brought a serious frown to Latina's face, but the girl couldn't deny what she'd said.

"You don't care to rebuke me for talking to the sister of her highness, the king of Vassilios, in that manner?"

"...I don't have any authority in this country. As long as you don't make light of the wishes of the Golden King, then I don't mind whatever you may say to me personally."

Latina was aware that she was more precious to Chrysos than anyone else. And she also understood that as this country's king, Chrysos's intentions were to be respected. But at the same time, she reminded herself that she lacked any authority here, and didn't find it right that she was overly pampered thanks to Chrysos's influence.

And so, Latina had no intention of using Chrysos's name now, no matter how much Helmine's words may hurt.

Hearing Latina's response, Helmine broke out in a faint smile. It was impossible to tell what she thought of Latina from that expression alone.

"Due to the encroachment by the Fourth Demon Lord, the south of Laband suffered great damage. Until that damage is recovered from, it will also impact the power of the nation significantly. Apparently the neighboring nations see this as a chance to cause unrest."

Helmine's words were information that, in theory, Latina had wanted to hear. Even so, hearing what had occurred was even more painful than she had expected.

"It seems that a number of the small nations to the east of Laband

were driven to ruin by the Seventh Demon Lord. It was enough of a disaster that saying losses were great doesn't even begin to cover it."

Helmine looked at Latina, the girl's face pale and her hands gripped so tightly that her knuckles had turned white. The faint smile still remained on her face.

"Even so, that shouldn't be any reason for you to break down in tears, right? Or do you have a reason significant enough to make you cry?"

Even breathing felt painful to Latina. She was unable to even raise a rebuttal, and realized that she herself had sought to hear what Helmine was saying.

"Even if you do have a reason, to be able to do nothing about it but cry... Well, you're still just a little lady, so maybe there's no helping that," Helmine said, her smile shifting into an outright sneer.

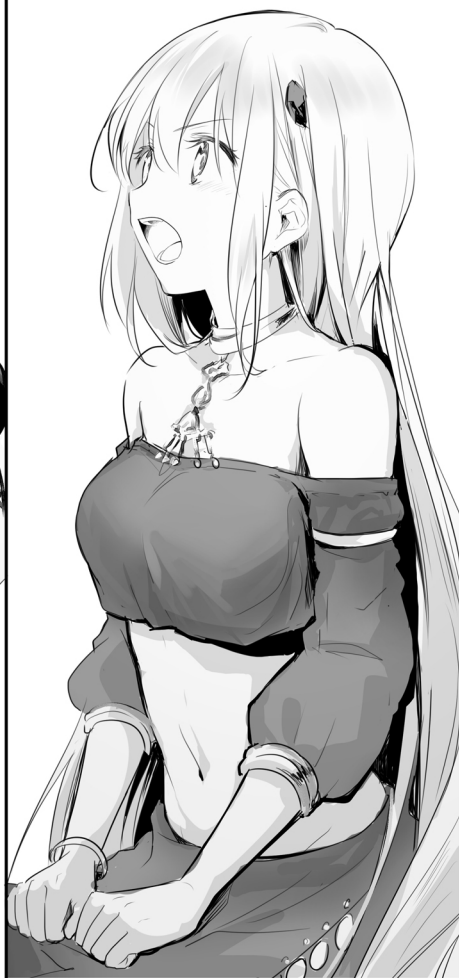
Latina silently scolded herself for starting to avert her eyes, lifting her face back up properly.

"I'm..." Latina started in a pained, hoarse voice, her gaze fixed straight on Helmine. "Certainly still immature. It's true... that I'm not able to do anything."

Helmine's blue eyes opened a little wider.

"It's a fact that I'm still inexperienced, unable to do anything but cry... But, even so..." She firmly wiped away her tears, and steadily put more strength behind her voice. "I'm properly reflecting on it all. About what I've done, and about what I should have done... And about what I can do now."

Latina's eyes, now full of determination, looked straight at Helmine as she said that.



Helmine gave a giggle at that sight, and then said as if in challenge, "I see. Well then, go ahead and try, 'little lady.'"

Seeing this break in the conversation and the air between the two of them, Rose decided to excuse herself from this place. As Rose's bodyguard, Helmine wouldn't be permitted to leave the room on her own, and she judged that Latina's spirits may have recovered, but she still needed time to sort through her feelings.

"Well then, Latina, I will be returning to my own room, but... I will still be staying in Vassilios for a while yet. If you need anything, then do not hesitate to ask," Rose said, the gentle smile still on her face.

"Right... Thank you, Lady Rose," Latina said, a good bit of vigor having returned to her expression.

Rose left the villa, that kind expression still on her face. She once more opened her mouth when they were a good distance from that place, turning around towards the person behind her and saying in a reproachful tone, "Please do not act so spitefully."

Helmine smiled and shrugged her shoulders a bit in response to Rose's words.

"I just had the urge to pick on her a bit."

"It may be only natural to call Latina 'young,' based on her age."

"That's for sure," Helmine said with a giggle, looking somewhat like she was gazing off into the distance.

"However, children mature quicker than you think, don't they? The last time I met her, she was just a little lady who was like a kitten, snapping at anything and everything."

Helmine thought back on how that young girl had shot back an "I'm not little!" to everything she did and said. Unable to look at things objectively, rather seeing and reacting to everything based on her own personal feelings, she had been a young girl in every way.

"She's grown up enough to acknowledge her own immaturity, hasn't she?" Helmine said with a smirk.

Rose gave a sigh as she stared at this woman, who had lived for a great deal longer than she had.

Rose had no intention of being overly soft on Latina, the way that Dale and Chrysos were. But even so, Latina was an adorable "little sister" who adored Rose. She wasn't particularly fond of seeing the girl get one-sidedly talked down.

"I believe it isn't especially mature to tease someone, either."

"That's true. I still have a ways to go myself," Helmine said with a giggle, then smiled, unperturbed by Rose's words. "Ever since seeing Dale's face like that, I just got the urge to tease someone."

Those words of Helmine's had a slightly different emotion behind

them than before, depriving Rose of her need to object.

“That child really did seem to be driven into a corner. I hadn’t seen him in that state in some time, so I couldn’t help myself... I really do have a way to go myself.”

Before accompanying Rose to Vassilios, Helmine had happened to see Dale at the Eldstedt estate.

He had cast aside his trademark black magical beast leather coat for shining armor, and as he replied to the cheers for the “Platinum Hero,” he didn’t seem to be worked up in the least. He seemed like a shining hero, his expression fitting his newly acquired nickname.

But to Helmine, he had the look of his younger self about him... that look of the young man who had learned what it felt like to kill another person through his role as a hero, and suffered his own anguish as a result.

At that time, Helmine didn’t know what had him so up against the wall, but when she saw him again, she became certain. He was hugging Latina, doting on her so heavily that he seemed almost dependent on her. The sight of Dale clinging to her so desperately (as if he never wanted lose her again, and if he did, he would lose himself in turn) was more than enough that even if she didn’t know the details, she could tell that Latina was the reason Dale had been driven to his breaking point.

Seeing that old, familiar face made her want to tease them a little.

She wasn’t sure what Latina was grieving and moaning about, and she didn’t feel the need to be. She also didn’t know what Latina had done, or why that caused Dale to suffer so much. And so, she didn’t intend to preach to her, or drive her into a corner with logic. Instead, it was ultimately just “teasing” of her own volition, based on her own emotions. It was a bit of revenge, as if Helmine was saying, “Look at how much your actions caused Dale to suffer.”

That prideful girl would be able to withstand someone she “hated” so much judging her immaturity and faults. But because Helmine recognized that, she needed to raise her opinion of the girl. Perhaps she was now just a step away from the point where she couldn’t call her “little lady” anymore.

Musing on that, Helmine once more muttered to herself, “Kids really do grow up fast, don’t they?”

Meanwhile, after seeing Helmine and Rose off, Latina sat with her arms wrapped around her knees for a while atop the bed. She then rolled about back and forth, as if turning in her sleep. She paid no heed to how disheveled her clothing was, with the hem of her skirt turned up and her legs suggestively exposed.

“...Haa.” She let out a sigh. Because there was nobody else around to hear, she muttered to herself, “...I just keep messing up. I just can’t

grow up, can I...?”

Helmine had said all that, but Latina honestly still didn't know what to do.

Thanks to Chrysos's assistance she was saved, but when she was recognized by the other demon lords as an enemy, it wouldn't have been a surprise for her to be completely annihilated. No matter how far she ran and hid, she didn't think she would be able to escape. But if she did that, then until she was found, the demon lords would burn everything to the ground in their search for her.

If she'd been honest with Dale, telling him that the other demon lords were targeting her, then he would have protected her even if he had to sacrifice himself in the process. But she wanted to protect Dale just as badly, and didn't want him to do such a thing.

It wasn't just Dale, either. The place where she lived, Kreuz, would surely become a target for the demon lords. Her friends and the townsfolk had been so kind to her as she grew up, and Latina wanted to protect all of them.

All of those people who had given her something, after she had lost everything on that day when she was young. All of those who had taken her in and given her love, after everything about her had been thrown aside and she was driven out. Because she had once lost everything, Latina feared losing things again more than anything else.

And then there was Chrysos. They had been born and raised together, and she was Latina's precious other half. They had shared everything since their birth, and her sister was her one and only remaining family member.

All of those precious people, weighed against her one, tiny life... They couldn't even be compared. If it would protect the people she cared about, then she would gladly offer up her life.

“But... I may have done the same... So Dale wouldn't have given up so easily, right...?”

She didn't want him to act recklessly. And even though Dale was known as a first-rate adventurer, she never imagined he could carry out something as insane as making enemies of all the demon lords. However, it was also true that she hadn't thought it was utterly impossible. It was precisely because she had the thought “If it's Dale, then he just might pull it off” that when she saw that disastrous state of the space with the thrones, even though she didn't know any of the circumstances, she intuitively thought of it as Dale's doing.

“What should I have done...?”

She had originally thought that if she just disappeared, things would return to the way that they had been before. She hadn't even considered the possibility of the Demon Lords of Calamity running rampant, nor had she thought Dale would target the demon lords not

of the Calamities, as they hadn't done anything wrong.

"...That may have been my greatest sin, failing to think of that..."

Thinking back on how she'd merely been dragged along in the ensuing chaos, Latina pressed her cheek up against the pillow.

Caught up in her feelings of powerlessness, Latina didn't even notice herself doze off.

"Latina?"

Hearing that voice, Latina opened her eyes. Dale's face was right before her, looking worried. "What's wrong?" he asked, his kind voice full of concern, though Latina was uncertain why.

Dale enveloped her cheek in the palm of his hand. His fingertips gently stroked the contours of her eyes as if to comfort her. It was then that Latina remembered that she'd fallen asleep with the traces of her sobbing still showing on her face.

"I'm fi—" She caught herself midway through answering. She still hadn't found an answer to the question she had been contemplating. Nonetheless, she had made a firm decision to no longer merely avert her eyes and weep.

"...I've been thinking. I made a lot of mistakes."

"Latina?"

"I hurt you a whole lot, Dale, and brought you so much suffering too. 'I'm sorry' doesn't even begin to cover it, but... I feel like I shouldn't just let myself stop thinking about what I did wrong."

Latina's words caused Dale to break out in a slightly strained smile, but he continued gently stroking her cheeks and head. That kind gaze, and his adoring caress, were those of the man she adored, but— Latina suddenly opened her eyes, as if in surprise.

That wasn't all I was wrong about... that I forgot about... was the thought that suddenly came to mind.

She had been wrong.

She had understood it further in the past. It was something she had always thought about when she was a child, but at some point she had forgotten.

I...

When Dale asked her to marry him, her childhood wish had been granted. Those dreamlike feelings of bliss had caused her to forget before she even realized it.

What she'd wanted to become wasn't simply someone who Dale doted on and called "cute." That wouldn't be any different from when she was just his "beloved daughter." It wasn't enough to make her the grown woman she wanted to be.

I had wanted... to become an adult who could stand by Dale's side... Someone who could support him...

In her current state, she was merely the subject of Dale's one-sided

dotting. She had grown complacent, and in turn had lost sight of the person she had wanted to become.

It was no surprise that she found herself being called “little lady.” After all, she’d been childish enough to deserve the name.

“I really did make a lot of mistakes, didn’t I...?”

“You did?”

“Yeah. I did nothing *but* screw up... So I want you to tell me properly when I do something wrong... to tell me what you want me to do, and what you’re thinking...”

She remembered Dale’s desperate words that she’d heard when she awoke in Vassilios. Those words that sounded so painful, as if his heart were about to burst. He had earnestly wanted her to let him protect her, but Latina felt the same way, and so she didn’t know what to do.

“I was wrong, but... I really did want to protect you, Dale.”

“Right, that’s true... I knew, too... that you’d feel that way, Latina,” Dale said in agreement with a troubled look on his face, both his hands gently touching Latina all the while.

“You’re so kind like that, Dale, so... you’re always so nice to me. I know that you’d forgive anything and everything I do... even if that caused you to suffer.”

“It’s fine, though... being soft on you.”

A part of Dale realized he couldn’t really hold her actions against her.

Demon lords were like threats incarnate, and Latina had become a target for all of them. Since she wanted to settle things without anyone coming to harm, sacrificing herself was a reasonable choice. To be honest, when he considered the situation, he realized that was the conclusion that would result in the least number of losses.

Even so, he hadn’t been able to accept that, and decided to keep struggling, using all his strength to mow down those in his path.

As Dale’s thoughts brought a strained expression to his face, Latina watched him gently.

He found himself unable to settle down, worried that the blood-stained cruelty he had wrought would be discovered.

“If... the same things were to happen again, I may make the same choices again...”

“That’d... be a problem...”

“Just like you want to protect me, I feel the same way about you, Dale. But...” Latina said, halting for a moment as she gripped the hand Dale was touching tightly. “I’ll talk to you properly from now on, Dale. I’ll think things through together with you, about what I want to do, and what I *should* do.”

“Huh...?”

“I want to be with you, Dale. I want to be someone who can protect you too, rather than just being someone you protect. Therefore, so that I can be someone who can properly stand by your side... Next time, I want to listen to how you feel, and talk things over together.”

A strained smile crossed Dale’s face after hearing Latina’s words, this one possessing a slightly different meaning than the one he’d worn before.

“I’ve... gotta reflect on my actions, too.”

“Dale?”

“There’s also a whole lot I should’ve discussed with you...”

When Dale looked at that beloved girl in his arms, she looked almost dazzling to him.

“I proposed to you, Latina. As husband and wife, we should be sharing even the things that are painful.”

“...Yeah.”

“So if something happens again... please don’t hide anything from me. I’ll manage even the stuff you think is impossible one way or another.”

“Right.”

“Ah, and when things are tough for me... can I rely on you, too? Though, then again, I’d want to act tough at times like that...”

“I’ll work hard for your sake too, when such times come. You’re always saving me... so I want to do something to pay you back,” she replied, and Dale’s smile grew more relaxed.

Just having her by his side since she was young had supported and saved him. But she’d surely say that wasn’t enough.

“...You don’t have any more siblings, right?”

“I don’t.”

“I’d like... to hear about your family. You couldn’t talk about them because you had to hide Chrysos, right?”

“You heard that from Chrysos?”

“Yeah,” Dale replied, and Latina’s expression grew a little pained.

“I’m sorry for not saying anything. But Chrysos is more precious to me than anyone else, in a different way from how I feel about you.”

“She is your one and only sister, after all.”

By nature, devils had a strong sense of camaraderie and regarded family as especially precious.

Chrysos was Latina’s only sister, and her last remaining family member. Dale fully understood that Latina and Chrysos held deep feelings for one another.

“Is there anything else you’re still hiding?”

“...There’s still some stuff that’s embarrassing.”

“I guess that stuff may still be okay, even when it comes to a

husband and wife..."

"What about you, Dale?"

"Hmm?"

"Is... there anything you're hiding from me, Dale?"

"Ah..."

Dale reflexively began to dodge the question, but after some thought, he reconsidered. It wouldn't be right to force her to speak and then shelve the matter of his own secrets.

She was no longer just a small child who needed to be sheltered. And he intended to treat her accordingly.

"To be honest, I'm a hero."

That was why Dale revealed some information he had kept to himself until now. After hearing that, Latina sat silently staring at Dale's face for a while. She may have already heard it from Rose, but it was still an extraordinary shock.

"Um, Latina?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you alright?"

Latina snapped out of it once Dale called out to her, and the tension drained from her shoulders so thoroughly you could almost hear the hiss of it escaping.

"I'm just surprised..."

"I'd heard from Lady Rose, too... that you were a hero."

"Is that so?"

Thinking about it, Dale realized that he had not exactly forbidden anyone from talking about it, so this wasn't that much of a surprise. Rather, it was perhaps more of a surprise that Latina hadn't learned that fact up until now.

"I didn't ask Lady Rose, but... are you alright, being a demon?"

"You should probably be better informed about that than I am, right?"

Even Dale couldn't help but be bewildered. At least technically, Latina was Dale's "master." And it was Latina herself that told him that "demon lords are permitted to know a portion of the foundations of the world."

"Huh? Ah, now that you mention it, that's true..."

Latina had completely set aside the powers she'd been granted as a demon lord, so she'd completely forgotten she had such an ability.

"Well, you're the Eighth Demon Lord, so... you're not quite the antithesis of a hero, who exists to eliminate demon lords. I guess it kind of worked out."

"I see..." Latina said with a nod, lacking even a hint of demon lord-ness about her.

“I need to get my act together more after all,” Latina flatly stated. Dale was instinctively about to say, “You’re fine the way you are, Latina,” but managed to keep it to himself.

Dale thought to himself, *Latina’s so cute, nodding her head while looking all serious like that.* That was already a conditioned reflex at this point. He successfully held himself back from voicing that comment, though, out of consideration for the fact that she was trying to become an adult, as saying that would be like taking back his agreement to treat her as one.

He silently berated himself, wondering which one of them was really the one who still had some growing up to do.

“Dale?”

“It’s nothing... I was just thinking that you really have grown, Latina.”

“...?” Latina tilted her head a bit, as she’d just been so keenly feeling her own immaturity.

“I’ve gotta get my act together, too.”

“Aren’t you already a proper, full fledged adult, Dale?”

“Hmm...”

Rather than treating her as an equal partner or seeing her as his “master,” Dale really did prefer to be someone that she could rely on. His pride as a man wouldn’t allow him to back down on that point.

However, they were finally able to be together again like this.

“Let’s try to do things right from here on out.”

“Yeah.”

It would be good if they could talk things through with one another, no matter how much they screwed up. While thinking that, Dale took Latina’s hand in his own, and the two of them stayed that way.

†

Having talked things over with Dale, Latina then visited Chrysos’s room alone after dinner. It wasn’t the room where they had lived together when they were young. It was instead a high-quality one from which the authority of a king could be felt. However, there were always ladies-in-waiting and guards in the next room over, so it was a formal space lacking in absolute privacy.

“It feels odd somehow, using human language around you, Chrysos.”

“It is not a conversation you particularly want others to overhear, yes? There are those who could understand bits and pieces, but few could understand everything. That makes it suitable for a private conversation, would you not say?” Chrysos said with a slightly mischievous look on her face, then she took a sip of the tea Latina had

prepared, a bit of a glint in her eyes.

Normally, preparing tea would be a task for a lady-in-waiting. But Latina wanted this time to be for the two of them alone, so she successfully got the lady-in-waiting to back down using the excuse that this was a tea from Laband which Sylvia had shared with her. The tools and methods used for handling tea differed between Vassilios and Laband. Chrysos had sensed that Latina had something to discuss when the girl went out of her way to visit her room, and didn't particularly try to object.

"Once our exchange with Laband begins, it will be necessary for those of this nation to study the language, yes?"

"The other races can't even pronounce devil words without an affinity for it, after all..."

The basic criteria as to whether or not someone could use magic was if they could pronounce the so called "spell language." The devil race all had an affinity for magic, and it served as their mother tongue, but for other races, it was a language that could be utterly impossible for them to speak.

However, the languages used by other races had no such restrictions, making it possible to simply study and employ them.

"So, what is it, Platina?"

"Dale hadn't told me..." Latina muttered, staring into the teacup in her hand. The depressed-looking face on the other side of the pale dark brown surface of the liquid looked back at her. "Did you know, Chrysos? That Dale... was a hero?"

Chrysos sat in silence for a while, but soon confirmed, not wanting to lie to her twin sister. "That is correct. After you were sealed away... before long, someone began laying the demon lords to rest. Considering my position, I was unable to determine who that was... but upon hearing what Sylvia and the others had to say, I soon realized."

"Sylvia..."

"There was a hero by your side, Platina. He was moving about, killing off demon lords at a pace that would normally be utterly impossible. After hearing of his relationship with you... I conjectured that perhaps you had made that hero into your retainer."

"I see..."

"And I sensed that he was the reason you said you would not return to me," said Chrysos, puffing up her cheeks in a way that really did resemble Latina. Latina smiled just a bit in response to her sister's expression, then looked down once more.

"So... Dale really was the one who... defeated the demon lords, then?" Latina said, hesitant to use the word "killed."

Seeing her sister like that, Chrysos mentally sighed to herself, and

said in a composed tone, "That is correct."

"From the state of the thrones, it seemed like... Did he defeat all of the other demon lords...?"

"...I suppose there's no denying it at this point," Chrysos replied, realizing she wouldn't be able to lie to her clever sister now.

Latina's expression grew pained.

"That... was because of me, wasn't it?"

She had already sensed it from the stories of those around her, but looking at her sister now caused Chrysos to think it once more: Latina was still kind and earnest by nature, just as she'd been when they were young. That fact caused her to feel both relieved and glad. That was because it was proof that even after being exiled from this country and losing their father, she was still able to grow up in a place where she was healthy and safe.

"...I suppose I must give that man my thanks."

"Huh?"

"No, it is nothing."

Latina apparently hadn't caught the words that Chrysos had quietly whispered, causing the Golden King to feel relieved. It was precisely because she cared for her sister so greatly that she couldn't let anyone know she had said such a thing about that deplorable hero.

"...It seems you really were not suited to become the First Demon Lord."

"Chrysos?"

Chrysos gave a small chuckle, then made eye contact with Latina.

"There is no need for you to worry about it, Platina."

"But..."

The demon lords other than the Calamities had not done anything deserving of death. They were unreasonably killed, bringing misfortune to the retainers and people under their protection as well.

Latina's expression clearly showed what she was thinking. *Even if you tell me not to worry about it..* Chrysos gave another small laugh.

"You are a demon lord... Though you may be a low-ranking one, they still tried to harm a 'god.' If that is not worthy of being called a sin, then what is?"

"But..."

"Therefore, what occurred was divine punishment... The only ones permitted to eliminate demon lords are our antithesis, heroes, after all."

That was the natural order, decided on by the higher-ranking gods of the seven colors, who made up the world itself.

With a faint smile on her face, Chrysos stroked her sister's cheek like she'd done when they were young, mimicking the action her parents had used to comfort the pampered girl. She was a little

surprised and yet also relieved at how naturally that action came to her. Chrysos had thought she'd changed so much, but something from her youth remained so clearly within her, which left her feeling a little embarrassed.

"It is possible for demon lords to harm one another, as they are of the same kind. However, that doesn't mean that such a thing is 'permitted.' Such an act is a valid cause for retribution."

The only one permitted to interfere with the other demon lords from amongst their number is the Eighth Demon Lord, Latina. Such a being came about inherently as a means to reign in the other demon lords, after all.

Just like the Second Demon Lord had once done to the First, it was possible for one demon lord to destroy another. But at the same time, that was considered an irregular act for this world.

If such a thing were to occur, there was a high chance they would both be destroyed at the same time. The one who had taught Chrysos that was a priestess who was said to be exceptionally uncommon, possessing a power that was utterly unprecedented in devil history: Mov, whose name indicated a color of the gods. When Chrysos had been told that, she didn't understand the precise meaning behind those words. Looking back on them now, though, she finally understood.

"And so, they simply earned their just desserts. There is no need for you to worry yourself over the matter. What occurred was only a natural conclusion, after all." Even while she said that, she knew that Latina would not accept that so easily.

From Chrysos's point of view as the First Demon Lord, she knew full well that the other demon lords had no choice but to give their approval. But since Latina was her one and only precious sister, Chrysos also felt they needed to face retribution for laying a hand on the girl. Regardless of how it happened, such a thing needed to occur.

In bad taste, the Second Demon Lord saw even attempts at revenge on her as enjoyable, and was arrogantly confident that she would come to no harm even if other demon lords tried to do so. But normally, the demon lords would never dare interfere with others of their kind.

Chrysos herself had also been prepared for her own demise.

In addition to her natural divine protection, the Eighth Demon Lord herself, Latina, didn't see Chrysos as an enemy. And from the way that the hero serving as her retainer was a hardcore doting idiot of a husband, Chrysos judged that he would not cast judgment on her immediately. But even so, none of that was absolute. However, she also felt that there was no helping that.

She had been prepared to dirty her hands as much as it took to get

her sister back, no matter how much others may blame her, so she had no room to speak. But her naturally kind sister could surely never cast her aside so easily, which made Chrysos glad.

“Platina, demon lords are gods. It is only natural for them to be arrogant beings, existing far beyond mortal reasoning, yes?”

“But...”

“And yet, we must also try to maintain our perspectives as people. In that regard, your concerns are also correct.”

“Chrysos...”

Latina lifted up her face, which showed the complex emotions she was feeling, in response to her sister’s voice. While Chrysos kept always looking firmly ahead, she had always relied on the kind people around her in comparison. Her own inadequacies made it feel like her heart was being crushed.

“Never change, Platina.” Chrysos then dared to add, “So that I do not become an arrogant being who has forgotten what it is like to be a person... So that I do not end up in a bloody battle with your one and only retainer, in which we cut down anything and everything.”

It may have troubled Latina, but that was what Chrysos thought. She was also only able to be herself, with the heart of a person rather than being solely the First Demon Lord, when she was by her sister’s side. That was all that maintained her sense of self, so that she wasn’t crushed by her duties as king.

“Act as our restraints.”

And so, she wished for Latina to remain as she was now.

Chrysos smiled while saying that, while Latina looked back, seeming troubled. Latina had become aware of her own immaturity, so she couldn’t so readily accept that.

“Even though... I think I’m no good as I am now?”

“It is essential to keep growing, yes. And it is impossible to never change at all.” Chrysos hugged her overly serious sister tight. In her current life, she never felt anyone else’s warmth this closely. She wondered why her sister couldn’t understand why that alone was such a great salvation for her.

“However, Platina... please stay as you are. You understand as well, do you not? I am asking you to let me remain as your sister.”

“Is that really true?”

“It is.”

While Chrysos found the admission strangely irritating, she was certain that man thought similarly. *I cannot believe he thinks the same as I do! For some reason I cannot help but find it vexing! And yet, that man has surely also been saved by my kind natured sister...* Chrysos thought.

“To us, being able to protect you so that you can remain as you

are is akin to sustenance... though in a way, that may perhaps be terribly difficult to handle.”

No matter how much she had to dirty herself while walking her path, and how much blood and corpses piled up along the way, if nothing else, she didn't want that to come anywhere near the beloved girl she wished to protect.

Carrying the exact same load wasn't the only means of sharing a burden.

She wanted her precious sister to live in a kind, gentle world.

However, that clever girl would surely realize she was being protected, and understand the burden that those around her were bearing. That understanding alone was plenty.

And no matter how painful the tasks she undertook may be, not having the one she cared so much about have to bear them was enough to save her.

That man likely felt the same.

I sincerely don't wish to admit it, though, Chrysos thought to herself, feeling disappointed. It was also an awkward feeling for her, realizing they understood one another.

“I can't say I fully understand... but I'll try to think about what you said, Chrysos.” Chrysos couldn't help but let out a chuckle at that overly serious response from Latina.

“That should be enough for now, yes?” Chrysos then hugged her sister tighter and said, “So stay like this, by my side.”

Latina had a strange reaction to Chrysos's words. Her gaze darted around, and she made a face like she was having trouble getting the words out. Though Latina herself wasn't fond of the way that her thoughts showed clearly on her face, Chrysos found it charming.

Chrysos was well aware of it, but Latina didn't want to stay in Vassilios. Without her even realizing it, her brows grew furrowed. Even if it had been to protect her, Latina was declared a criminal and exiled, so there were likely those who would despise her in Vassilios. However, Chrysos now possessed enough authority to protect her from such people, and she would not allow anyone to act disrespectfully towards Latina.

Still, perhaps she disliked the idea of getting wrapped up in politics.

From what she'd heard from Sylvia and Rose, she got the impression that Latina had received an education and been trained in manners befitting a noble lady of Laband. However, she apparently had no training as a ruler, which was unsurprising, considering she'd been living peacefully as a commoner.

In that case, it seemed reasonable to have her live in a tranquil environment where she didn't need to have anything to do with such

greedy people. That way, Platina wouldn't need to worry about anything.

Lately Latina had become able to move around a bit, so she started doing her own laundry, coming and going in the kitchen, and on top of all that, apparently even polishing up the pots, but she didn't need to push herself so hard, or at least that's what Chrysos thought.

Of course, that was where Latina's wish to go back home lay. She got even more fired up when she was busy, a true workaholic.

Latina was aware that in her current situation, it was the job of the ladies-in-waiting to take care of her day to day needs. She accepted them waiting on her, but she couldn't help but feel irritated about it.

Latina tried to calm down and think the matter through for Dale's sake, but before long she was doing laundry and polishing up pots and pans. That polishing in particular was ideal for whiling away her time without needing to think about anything, and it made everything all nice and shiny, so it was like killing two birds with one stone. She enjoyed doing it, concentrating on getting the pots good and polished, and ended up feeling a sense of accomplishment that left her completely refreshed.

"...A day may come when I can live by your side, Chrysos, but... for now, I'm returning to Kreuz. That place is now the one that I'd call my 'home town.'"

Naturally, wanting to work wasn't her only reason, but that was how Latina conveyed her feelings to Chrysos.

"Platina..."

"There are a lot of people there who worry about me... and that makes me very happy," Latina said, looking entirely her usual self.

"I... suppose I should feel fortunate, that you have a place where you can feel that way," Chrysos responded, holding back a sigh. She quietly resolved to ensure the diplomatic relationship between Vassilios and Laband was established even a moment sooner.

As for Latina, she was grateful to hear how Chrysos felt, but she also couldn't keep on living as "the beloved sister of Her Majesty, the demon lord."

Ever since we were children... I always thought that "wife" sounded far more wonderful than "princess."

The woman that Latina admired most of all was Dale's grandmother, Wendelgard. She grew old peacefully while surrounded by her grandchildren and her clan, beloved by a great many people. Latina hoped that she could become a "Granny" like that someday.

She did have some admiration for the beautiful dresses and splendor of high society, but she didn't want to become part of it. In that way, Latina's thinking was that of a commoner to her very core.

“It’s not like this is a final farewell, like it was before...”

“...That’s true.”

“We’ll definitely meet again.”

“Yes. Without fail.”

Chrysos’s arms remained around Latina, who then hugged her sister back. The hair of the two girls embracing one another was the same color, giving off the same platinum shine.

When they had said farewell in the past it had been hurried and they didn’t quite understand what was going on, only knowing that they would never meet again. It was a parting that was nothing but sad and painful.

But this time, it was different.

They would surely be able to meet once more.

The number of beings who could harm a demon lord were limited. As such, there were none who could get in the way of these two demon lords’ wishes.

I would not allow even that man to interfere, Chrysos thought heatedly in regards to the only person who could possibly prove a hinderance. With that thought, she hugged Latina even tighter, wanting to get even more out of her time together with her sister.

2: The Platinum-haired Maiden Says “I’m Home”

Dale and Latina’s return to Kreuz came on a sunny morning, not long after Latina had made up her mind after talking to Dale and Chrysos.

If a group of formal delegates from Laband were to visit Vassilios and confirm Dale’s presence there, it could cause issues. After all, it couldn’t be allowed to become part of official records that the hero of the nation had been driven by blind passion to strike down the ruler of a friendly country, even if he hadn’t actually carried it out.

Without Latina noticing, the seasons had shifted, and even the hot climate of Vassilios had changed to that of a relatively comfortable spring. Chrysos squinted her eyes against the sunlight of the vast, gentle light blue sky while she saw them off. The gray-furred mythical beast that had become a black silhouette in that light flapped his heavy wings and headed off towards Kreuz. That was Hagel, running through the sky with Latina and Dale astride his back.

Hagel felt less of a load now than he did when carrying just Dale, thanks to Latina’s skilled magical support. Concerned about the burden continuously casting weight reduction magic was placing on Latina, Dale called out in a worried voice, “You still haven’t fully recovered yet, right? Don’t push yourself.”

“You don’t need to worry so much. I’ve been sleeping so much that I may have even formed a habit of drifting off,” Latina said with a smile, held in Dale’s arms.

The flashy platinum armor Hagel wore was made for the sake of appearance, but it also had a functional aspect to it, being equipped with a saddle for when Dale rode on his back. It had plenty of room for Dale alone, but it was a little cramped when he was riding along with Latina. That said, when Dale realized it just gave him a reason to hold Latina more closely, it stifled any complaints he might have had.

When Latina tried to lean out in curiosity during this trip through the sky, the feeling of trepidation in that moment was Dale’s, rather than hers... Accordingly, he made a point of holding her tightly from then on.

Vint took the lead in a flighty manner, shifting whimsically from Hagel’s front to his side, and then diagonally in front of him. It was a pattern of flight that clearly expressed the pup’s youthful lack of

inhibitions.

Vint dropped his speed and came up alongside Hagel. "Woof," he said, then lowered his speed further. He clearly had some kind of goal in mind.

"Vint?"

"What's up?"

The pair atop Hagel's back tilted their heads in response to Vint's actions. Latina then looked up at Dale, who was seated behind her.

"Is there something over that way?" Unfortunately, nothing came to Dale's mind in response to Latina's question.

On the way to Vassilios, Dale had completely lost his cool, and he was full of dark emotions that he could never let her know about. He was in no state to casually take in his surroundings at the time.

"Want to go check it out?"

"Do you mind if we do that?" Latina asked Hagel, whose back she was riding on, only for a response to come back so quickly that Dale didn't even have a chance to interrupt. "Very well."

To outsiders Hagel was perceived as Dale's mount, but in actuality he prioritized Latina's wishes above all else.

Right, well... I guess it makes sense for things to go that way. Dale thought with a strained expression on his face, but he shifted his attention to making sure Latina didn't fall off as their position on Hagel became less stable while they landed.

As they approached the ground, they were able to determine what was going on down there. A good number of people could be seen, but it wasn't a town. There were a number of large tents erected, and guards keeping watch over the surroundings. It seemed to be some kind of base.

Upon seeing it, Dale realized this was the base set up between Kreuz and Vassilios that he had heard about from Sylvia.

"That's..."

In that case, this could be a precious opportunity to rest in a safe location on their long journey back to Kreuz. He would be fine, but there would definitely be a need to let Latina rest. As always, Latina was at the center of Dale's thoughts.

When those keeping watch on the ground saw that it was two mythical beasts descending from the sky, one of them Vint, who they were familiar with, they relaxed their guard and went to greet them.

Dale was a little surprised at the familiar faces he saw.

"Gregor."

"It seems you're completely back to your normal self."

"What does that mean?" Dale asked, astounded that Gregor would say such a thing the moment their eyes met.

"I mean exactly what I said."

“It’s been some time, Sir Gregor.”

“I don’t believe I’m in any position to be referred to so respectfully by Her Highness, the sister of the ruler of Vassilios...”

“Please cut that out, Sir Gregor...!”

Gregor’s expression remained perfectly straight, making it impossible to tell just how much he was joking. Latina’s cheeks, meanwhile, were flushed bright red and she wore a flustered expression on her face.

Dale nimbly descended from the saddle, and then offered Latina a hand, helping her down from Hagel’s back. He then gave Hagel, who shook his body a bit, a sympathetic pat on the neck.

“So have the Laband forces arrived...?” Dale asked to confirm, figuring Gregor’s presence here meant that was the case. According to what he’d heard in Vassilios, adventurers from Kreuz had established this base and were guarding it. But looking at the state of it now, it seemed the army had successfully finished withdrawing from the battlefield after the war with the Seventh Demon Lord was over.

They were told that once diplomatic relations were officially opened between Laband and Vassilios, this would become a key relay point on the highway that would be built between the nations, and would later develop into a town.

“Yeah. Just the magical beast habitats alone are enough to cause all sorts of problems in terms of security. But even so, things are apparently progressing smoother than expected.”

“I’d heard adventurers from Kreuz had set this place up and were guarding it, but...” Dale’s gaze turned from Gregor to the surrounding area, and he spotted many adventurers he recognized looking back at a distance. Without even thinking about it, he instinctively hugged Latina tight. Latina tilted her head in confusion.

However, Dale’s actions gave that crowd confidence that it was indeed the girl they’d been fighting for who was standing there.

The very earth itself trembled. That’s how the soldiers of Laband accompanying Gregor would later recount it.

“It’s the fairy princess!!”

“Ohhhhhh!!”

“Woohoo!!”

They didn’t give a damn about Dale, but their reaction was almost refreshingly clear. The news that the fairy princess had been found spread around the base even quicker and more precisely than it would have if they were a well-regulated army.

Even the fact that Latina let out a “Wah?!” in surprise was immediately communicated.

“We’ve confirmed a ‘Wah!’”

“That ‘Wah!’ was the same as always!”

“Those guys...” Dale groaned, a look of exasperation on his face.

Latina then looked up at Dale and nervously asked, “Do I say it that often?” Apparently that was what was concerning her. That phrase of Latina’s that she’d used since she was young gave off a childish impression, and despite her own intentions, she’d apparently had no success in correcting it.

Dale averted his gaze just a bit and said, “...It’s cute, so what’s the problem with it?”

“That’s... You’re always saying stuff like that, Dale...!” Latina said with a look of shock, but unfortunately for the girl, Dale wasn’t generous enough to deny that fact at this point. He didn’t want to say something she would know was a lie, after all.

“Woof!”

Dale’s averted gaze fell on Vint, who was gnawing away at a large bone. A little later on, Dale would learn that Vint was given a magical beast bone as a snack whenever he visited this base.

Latina left Dale’s side and headed towards some adventurers she recognized. It wasn’t just a group made up of old veterans, as there were a good number of young adventurers too. Regardless of age or experience as adventurers, they were all regulars of the Dancing Ocelot.

“Um... I’m sorry for worrying you...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine!”

“Don’t worry about it!”

“Um, but...!”

“Just seeing you safe and sound is enough to give us peace of mind.”

“Stuff like this is our job, too. So pay it no mind.”

Latina had tried to apologize, but was drowned out by the joyous voices of those grim looking fellows. When she undoubtedly raised her voice again, it was again drowned out by the middle-aged men’s hearty laughter.

Seeing this, Dale broke out in a smile without even realizing it. It was deeply moving for him, being able to see clearly just how much she was beloved by the people around her.

But he also thought things like *But you, who took advantage of the confusion to touch her, and the guy who’s acting overly familiar and holding her hand. And you over there, getting closer than you need to... You’ve gotten a taste of heaven, so it stands to reason that you’ve got to get a glimpse of hell, too. Prepare yourselves.* He was completely back to his old self.

The soldiers were dumbfounded at first by the commotion from the adventurers, but then a stir started to spread amongst them, as if they’d realized something. Just as Dale started to wonder what was

going on, Gregor clapped his hands together.

“By the way, Dale.”

“What is it?”

“I’m glad you were able to reunite with her, but...”

“But?”

“Did you tell her about that?”

“That?”

While Dale was wondering what Gregor meant, his ears picked up the whispers of the nearby young soldiers.

“...The Fairy Princess? The real one?”

What does “real one”... huh? Ahhh!

Latina had been given the nickname of “Fairy Princess” back when she was a child. “Cute” didn’t even begin to cover it when it came to her, nor did the customers of the Ocelot find “adorable waitress” enough to properly capture things. Dale had been in agreement with all that. And so, when the “Fairy Princess” nickname for Latina popped up, he accepted that as only natural.

He only just now realized that that nickname had gained a different meaning.

“Ah...”

Dale broke out in a cold sweat and looked away, and Gregor gave a sigh.

“So you didn’t tell her?”

“...I didn’t,” Dale affirmed, only for cheers from the soldiers to be added to those of the adventurers coming from behind him.

“H-Huh?” Latina’s eyes darted about in confusion, not grasping what was going on.

The regulars amongst the adventurers (the members of the “Young Girl’s Bodyguards”) immediately understood the circumstances. They hurriedly finished preparations and promptly deployed a formation to protect Latina.

While casting a sideways glance at that commotion, Gregor said to Dale, “Because you made that design with her as the model, her face is now known by the forces of nations the world over.”

“...I suppose that’s true.”

“Seeing her by your side along with those mythical beasts, and hearing her called the Fairy Princess, such a reaction is only natural.”

“Ugh...”

While Dale made a sour face, Gregor pointed out the present circumstances, more talkative than usual.

Dale had been driven into a corner and left in a worrying state, but that had all been completely wiped away. While he was left relieved, Gregor needed to complete one more job before he could meet up with Rose, so he’d also spoken up out of annoyance over that.

Gregor didn't even try to calm down the sudden chaos caused by the appearance of the rumored Fairy Princess, instead letting slip a slight chuckle.

Dale thought on how he could dodge the issue, but apparently Latina had heard the rough details of the reason behind the situation from the nearby regulars. Even from a distance, it was obvious that she was now flustered and in a bit of a panic.

Realizing that tales of her had spread throughout the world, exaggerated to such a degree that it was less a fish story and more akin to one about catching the legendary Leviathan itself, all Latina could think was... *Maybe... I should go back to Chrysos...* Latina gazed off into the distance, wondering if shutting herself away from the world may have been the correct decision after all.

Though they had fallen into such a chaotic state, the soldiers entrusted to the son of Duke Eldstedt fell back in line with a single shout from the thundering voice of their commander, Gregor. Meanwhile, the adventurers (who would normally be considered a synonym for "ruffians") kept themselves even more disciplined than the armed forces, with the "Bodyguards" at their center. Standing by Gregor's side, Dale was immediately impressed. He'd heard tell that there were iron-clad rules amongst them, but he had no idea what they were, and mentally sighed in astonishment.

"I'd like to let Latina rest, is there a tent or anything we can borrow?" Dale asked.

"In terms of numbers, we do have a surplus of tents. However, the only one suitable for Her Majesty, sister of the queen, is the one meant for myself, the commander," Gregor responded, looking a little troubled.

"I see. Well, it'll be fine."

Gregor's concern was only natural. He could hardly let the sister of the queen of Vassilios sleep in a tent in a huddle with the normal soldiers. But that girl felt more in tune with the common masses, and would surely not be in any state to sleep soundly if she drove Gregor out of his own tent.

However, Dale just waved him off with a strained smile, saying, "Latina's able to sleep pretty much anywhere. If you lend us some bedding, and... just the corner of a storage tent or something, that'd be good enough."

"That... won't become a problem later on?"

"It's not an issue if nobody finds out, right? Besides, Latina and I are only here unofficially, anyways," Dale bluntly responded.

As soon as the conversation was finished, he then touched Hagel's armor. With the hindrance of the armor out of the way, Hagel gave a hearty stretch, and the soldiers around him instinctively prepared to

flee.

“You’re free until tomorrow morning, Hagel, but what are you thinking of doing?”

“I think that perhaps a walk would be good, to stretch our legs, so I shall take my child along with me.”

“Woof?” Hearing his name called, Vint trotted over to his father’s side.

“I feel like saying ‘take care’... I don’t think you need it, but still...”

Taking Vint along with him, Hagel headed off into the forest. This base was constructed past the forest to the south of Kreuz, a magical beast territory where people didn’t enter.

“Latina,” Dale called out to the girl who had been escorted by a group of adventurers up until now, easily carrying Hagel’s armor as he walked along.

“What is it?”

“We’re going to borrow a corner of that tent there. What do you want to do? Do you want to turn in?”

“You don’t need to worry about me so much. I’ve been sitting all this time, so I need to move around properly at least a little,” Latina said with a strained smile in response to Dale’s overprotective nature. After thinking a bit, she turned to face the grizzled old regulars of the Ocelot.

“And I want to repay you all, for all the worry I caused.”

“Hey, hey!” the regulars responded with a laugh, but even so, Latina pressed further. “There’s not much I can do, but... can I least help out? Like with preparing dinner, for example...”

The second Latina said that, the expressions of the regulars shifted. They exchanged glances, looking somehow restless.

It was common knowledge amongst the regulars of the Ocelot that Latina was a skilled chef. She had studied under Kenneth, the owner, ever since she was young, and had thoroughly polished her cooking skills.

Latina was in charge of part of the cooking at the Ocelot. However, there wasn’t a specific menu of her home-cooking, so to speak. The only exception was the meals she made for Dale, a mix of his personal favorites and dishes from his home village.

That wasn’t prepared for the customers, though. No matter how much they wanted it, they weren’t able to eat the specially prepared home-cooking of that beloved, adorable waitress.

“O-Oh yeah...?”

“If you’re going to say all that, little lady, then...”

“I guess it’s fine if she helps out, right?”

“I’m going to go help out, Dale, alright?” Latina said with a smile

while looking at Dale from up close, clearly relieved to have something to do.

There was no way that Dale could refuse when faced with that smile.

However, it was then that Dale suddenly realized something. "Hey, the food for the adventurers here is provided by support from Kreuz, right?"

"Yeah. The supplies are sent here from Kreuz."

"The portions for the Laband forces fall under the management of the national expenses. They share their tents and supplies, though."

That was an utterly obvious reply from the geezers, but Dale made a strained expression in response.

"What is it?"

"Hey, won't it be a problem... if the adventurers end up monopolizing Latina's home cooking?" The regulars fell silent in response to Dale's words.

Latina was currently an idol on a global scale, so to speak. From their reaction just moments ago, it seemed clear that she had a great number of fans within the Laband forces. Unlike the regulars of the Ocelot, their feelings of admiration were born from hearsay about the heroine of an epic saga, the Fairy Princess, so they didn't know how to handle her.

The girl herself, meanwhile, was already entirely focused on the idea of taking on her first work in a while, almost skipping towards the large tent that served as the base's kitchen.

Dale and the regulars watched Latina happily head off. There wasn't any great difference between Dale and those geezers, as neither were able say anything when she looked so joyful.

"...I'll go talk things through with Gregor..."

"That may be for the best..."

The two groups would need to keep working alongside each other, so it would be an issue if relations between them became strained. Thinking the same thing, the men came to the same conclusion.

Gregor heard Dale's concerns, and so it was decided that for dinner that night, they would put aside ranks and the common folks and officers alike would eat together. And so, Latina ended up mincing up a mountain of vegetables. The occasionally uneven rhythm of her knife's chopping was somehow incredibly like her. As she steadily worked away, she was watched over by the Bodyguards. Perhaps as a result of their nervousness, they shared the opinion that it was the right way to go about things.

I suppose... that's the right sort of job for them, as "Bodyguards"...

Of course, Dale would never leave Latina's side, so he also sat down near her. A heap of onion skins piled up as he devoted his

attention to peeling them.

“It seems like you’re having fun,” Dale muttered to himself, hearing how much she was enjoying herself through the constant rhythm of her knife.

“Yeah, I am!” Dale hadn’t said that expecting a response, but she immediately replied with a wide smile.

There was just too much food to be prepared, making it difficult for Latina to manage on her own, so the people who were originally supposed to be in charge of tonight’s dinner also worked nearby.

Even so, Dale remained calm and composed, watching as Latina was in “work mode.”



Normally Latina was so aloof that Dale couldn't help but worry about her, but when it came to her work, she took things incredibly seriously. Dale was well aware of how thoroughly Kenneth had trained her, so he accepted letting those other bastards watch her too, just for now.

If they grew too captivated by her and neglected their own work, then Latina's evaluation of them would drop. Rather, it would flat out plummet, or so Dale thought.

Naturally, touching her was still strictly prohibited. With a smile still on his face, he mused that if anyone proved insolent enough to do so, they wouldn't live to see tomorrow.

Latina apparently didn't realize what was going on in his head, but she still had a slightly troubled look on her face as she came over to take the peeled onions from him.

"I didn't think it would be such a huge undertaking... and the work should have been all divvied up... Did I just cause more trouble, by saying something so selfish?"

"I can't imagine anyone would find it a bother. When it comes to being on duty for cooking for a group of adventurers, there are some who specialize in that, but there are probably a lot more who'd prefer to take it easy. And above all else, it's quite an event for a place so starved for entertainment. I'd imagine most of them will be grateful."

"Really...? But I don't want to cause Sir Gregor any problems..."

"That group makes their own meals when they're camping instead of on the march... They ought to appreciate a meal made by a professional."

Gregor was of high-ranking noble pedigree, but he had polished his swordsmanship abroad, and had personal experience walking the path of an adventurer, so his personality belied his station.

"Go ahead and make it as tasty as possible."

"Right."

Perhaps because of those words, Latina's energy showed no sign of waning while preparing the food. She didn't slow even for a moment. Apparently she had been overly restrained back in Vassilios.

The kitchen for this base was set up far from town and was still in the process of being outfitted, the ingredients available were limited, and the equipment available was the bare minimum. Even so, Latina worked joyfully away, seemingly having no concern whatsoever over the matter.

Looking at her now, it seemed that perhaps her quick recovery had been thanks to the way they'd forced her to rest up out of concern. It was busy now, but she seemed perfectly at home with that.

"Woof!"

“Hmm?”

Dale went out to check on the voice he'd heard from outside the tent, and found Vint and Hagel standing there holding their prey in their mouths. It was a large magical beast that would require the mainstays of the adventurer group to team up and properly equip themselves to take down. Dale wished they'd stop making a face like they just hunted it down because they had a little free time.

Following along after Dale, Latina also peeked her head out of the tent and pointed a carefree smile at the pups.

“That's amazing! Can I take it off your hands?”

“Woof!”

“Thanks. I'll be sure to put something together for you two, too.”

Dale thought that if Latina was enjoying herself, then there was nothing else to it, and stood up while rolling up his sleeves.

“You can't prepare something like this, right, Latina?”

“Yeah. I'd like to be able to someday, though,” Latina immediately replied. Dale couldn't help but wonder just how far she intended to proceed down the path of becoming a culinary professional.

“I'll handle the prep work.”

“Thanks!”

Dale's home village of Tislow was in a land that prospered in terms of hunting. Ever since he was a child, seeing the spoils of such hunts being prepared was a sight he found only natural. In that village, it was assumed that any adult male could manage that much.

As a result of those particular circumstances, by the time Dale had finished skinning it to his satisfaction, he seemed to be enjoying himself a bit. He hadn't been able to handle such a massive beast very often. It was a rather tricky endeavor, and before he knew it he was wholly absorbed in the task.

He didn't really have any room to talk when it came to Latina.

The fruits of the pups' hunt was transformed by Latina's hand into an exquisite meat dish. This locally sourced ingredient was massive enough that there were no concerns about depleting their food reserves. She'd managed to use it to make a meal that would be more than enough to let everyone present eat their fill. As the roast was prepared over the campfire's residual heat, it became a light pink and remained tender. With the scent of herbs added, it made for a first-rate dish, the sort that wouldn't feel at all out of place in a restaurant. The parts unsuited for a roast were used in a stew, which also proved enough to fill everyone's bowls.

They were in magical beast territory, so normally they'd always have several guards on duty, but for now, everyone was gathered to enjoy the meal. Vint and Hagel were also in the midst of a “meal” of their own. They possessed a far better ability to detect those around

them than any of the races, and intercepted anything approaching from the surroundings. Anything unfortunate enough to do so would become their meal.

Seeing so many people eating the food she made with smiles on their faces, Latina grinned as well.

“Dale.”

“What is it?”

“I really am happy,” Latina said, then rested her head on Dale’s shoulder. He couldn’t see her expression anymore as a result, but the warm weight he felt on his shoulder made him break out in a gentle smile.

“...I see.”

“Thank you, Dale.”

“Hmm?”

“For not giving up on me... and for bringing me back to such a warm, gentle place.”

“...Right.”

“Thanks.”

Looking at the people around, it was starting to look more like a banquet complete with alcohol. Seeing that sight which overlapped with her memories of how the Ocelot always looked, Latina’s heart overflowed with warmth.

Latina closed her eyes while wearing a happy expression, the friendly voices so lively she couldn’t even hear the crackling of the fire. She nodded off contentedly. Apparently she really had pushed herself too hard.

Dale broke out in a strained smile (though he felt so at peace that perhaps “strained” wasn’t quite the right word), and wrapped her up completely in his arms. Reminiscent of a kitten, Latina unconsciously shifted about to find the most comfortable position. In no time at all, she started snoozing away slightly out of tune, just like she’d done when she was a child.

Someone’s presence then appeared behind Dale, as if they had been waiting for that moment.

Dale sensed who that was without even needing to turn around, and the voice he had expected then called out to him. “...Dale.”

“What is it?”

Gregor handed one of the two cups he held in each hand to Dale. It gave off the slight scent of alcohol. However, just like Dale, Gregor had no intention of getting dead drunk on the battlefield, so he would never offer too strong a drink. Dale accepted it earnestly, trusting Gregor’s judgment enough not to bother questioning.

“Are you heading back to Kreuz?”

“That’s the plan.”

“You’ll have it rough from here on out.”

“Right back at you...”

Dale had just had unwanted fame thrust upon him, but Gregor would have his work tied to his ducal household increase. The scale of how “rough” they’d have it was completely different.

“Father dangled a ‘reward’ in front of me as well. He apparently wanted me to work quite hard.”

Contrary to Dale’s expectations, Gregor broke out in a smile, his expression not strained in the least.

“A ‘reward’?”

“It was just a brief comment, but he gave his word. ‘It would not be good for authority to gather with our household,’ he said. It would seem that even if I succeed my father, there is no need to enter into a strategic marriage with the daughter of a prestigious family.”

Such a statement was more than enough to motivate Gregor. Dale knew that as well, so he couldn’t hold back a small chuckle.

Naturally, Gregor’s father was also well aware that Gregor had feelings for a girl who would normally not be considered to be of a suitable status for one of a ducal household.

“I was sent to Vassilios in part by my father’s intentions as well. Our family effectively holds no authority in that nation, which will become an important neighbor in the future. Making inroads there would be of great value.”

“Latina is awful fond of Rose, after all...”

That queen, who doted on her sister, had also opened up to Rose a fair bit. Chrysos was earnest in her role as ruler of the nation, and would never do anything that worked against its interests. Even still, it could be said that she had earned a great deal more trust than the lords of Laband who would later come crawling, seeking whatever they could gain through the diplomatic relations opened with Vassilios.

“Well, give it your all.”

“Yeah, that’s my intention.”

They gave a slight clink of their glasses, then drank them dry.

After seeing off his friend, who left after that short exchange, Dale stood up too, Latina still in his arms.

It was far from a quiet environment, but she seemed to sleep happier in the midst of such liveliness. While looking at her with a gentle gaze, Dale walked towards the tent that would serve as their temporary lodging for the night.

It actually made for a more relaxing place to rest, being in this storage tent without any strangers’ gazes. Though it was the cozy spring season, the cold crept in at night. However, there was also the heat of the two wolves sleeping near the entrance, so it didn’t bother

them much.

Latina had a habit of squirming about restlessly before she awoke, so when Dale heard that familiar sound, his eyes shot open. Just as expected, Latina opened her eyes shortly after, as Dale watched over her. It wasn't as if she had trouble getting up, but shortly after awakening, she looked lethargic and defenseless. Dale couldn't help but smile upon seeing the adorable sight that he had all to himself.

"Dale?"

Still under the blanket, Latina noticed Dale watching her and tilted her head.

"Hey. Morning," Dale said, giving a nonchalant morning greeting.

"Good morning, Dale," Latina responded with a smile.

Despite the inconvenient circumstances, Latina did her best to get herself dressed properly before leaving the tent with Dale. She headed to the kitchen and made sandwiches from the leftover meat from the night before, and soup from the bone stock she had prepared. She pulled a large chunk of meat out of the soup and offered it to Vint and Hagel without bothering to season it. She made the sandwiches a little on the large side and then wrapped them up to save for lunch.

Latina had grown accustomed to this everyday atmosphere, in which everyone was busy attending their own responsibilities. As Dale and Latina ate their breakfast, they ended up staring at the people working around them.

"Considering Hagel's speed, we'll probably be able to make it to Kreuz tomorrow. I think we'll just keep on flying rather than camping for the night, but we'll take a break along the way."

"I'll be fine, but will you be alright, Hagel? And what about Vint? That wouldn't be pushing you too hard, would it?"

"Before I suffer fatigue, this fellow will use his magic."

The healing magic of the Earth element, which was Dale's specialty, excelled at recovering stamina. And to start with, Hagel's stamina as a grown mythical beast would vastly eclipse that of a human.

"Will sleep if tired, so alright," Vint replied, looking at Latina will engrossed in chowing down on the tender cooked meat. Ever since their time back in Kreuz, Vint had always been a pup who was good at going with the flow.

"Are we heading out soon?"

"I was thinking we'd wait a bit longer. I wanted to take the opportunity to gather a bit more information here..."

"Then I guess I'll brush Vint and Hagel... They're going to keep on working hard for us, so they deserve a bit of a reward, right?"

With those words, the two wolves' tails started wagging vigorously back and forth. And after receiving her supreme brushing

techniques, the fur of the two soaring wolves had grown smooth and fluffy. The severe change in their fur was enough that it would make for a striking before and after picture. They were clearly ready and raring to go, and it would be reasonable to say they were in the best possible condition.

When the time came for them to head out, Gregor was the only one who came to see them off. This seemed to have been done out of consideration for the fact that it would likely be impossible to get a large crowd under control if it came rushing towards them.

“Sorry for all the trouble, Sir Gregor.”

All the commotion had been because her fame had risen so greatly without her knowing about it, so this was really something of an “accident.” But seeing how Latina felt responsible despite this, Gregor broke out in a faintly strained smile.

“When things calm down, feel free to come visit us in the capital. Rose will surely be there as well by then.”

“Right!”

While watching that friendly farewell out of the corner of his eye, Dale put on Hagel’s saddle and then nimbly climbed atop it. As he had grown accustomed to doing, he also checked to make sure their luggage was tightly secured for the flight.

Realizing that even though they hadn’t come to see them off in person, the adventurers were watching from a distance, Latina smiled and waved farewell. Knowing from her personality that she would keep doing that forever if he didn’t move things along, Dale beckoned her over and helped her up into the saddle.

“We’re counting on you, Hagel.”

“Woof,” Hagel responded, jokingly mimicking Vint. Before any groans could be voiced, Hagel spread his wings and took off into the sky with a thunderous flap. Thanks to the natural capabilities of his race to soar through the heavens, now strengthened with magic, his massive frame was lifted up into the sky far more easily than one would expect. With a few flaps he reached a great height, and just a moment later, Vint joined him.

Latina leaned out so she could see the people below them, now resembling ants, and Dale held onto her tightly so that she wouldn’t fall. He seemed to have a firm grasp on her, but he still couldn’t help but worry that she might slip loose somehow.

The mythical beasts known as soaring wolves flew by “running” through the sky, but Dale got the impression that the flight had grown much smoother with Latina along. He thought to himself that perhaps Hagel had been worried about her, too.

Afterwards, they made a swift journey back to Kreuz through the day and night without needing to stop and camp, just as planned.

There were hardly any obstacles to worry about in the sky, and they were equipped with a “radar” in the form of their ability to pick up scents, so they were able to keep moving even at night. That was a big difference between them and flying dragons, which didn’t possess night vision.

In addition to when they descended for a rest, Latina also occasionally nodded off atop Hagel’s back. Again showing off how good he was at improvising, Vint also occasionally took a rest between the saddle where they were sitting and Hagel’s head.

Even from up in the air, they were able to easily locate their destination. The walls surrounding the town took the shape of a cross, which was the origin of its name. When she saw the brilliant rows of red rooftops making up the townscape, a joyful look crossed Latina’s face, looking almost like it was sparkling.

When the guard corps that protected Kreuz realized the identity of that shape high in the sky, they shifted from a defensive posture to a different one. After all, every guard in this town was plenty familiar with the mythical beast that looked like a gray-furred wolf with wings.

In a way, one could say that they had resumed preparations for battle, as they were well aware of the commotion that would soon occur.

Latina felt joy welling up from being able to walk through this beloved town with her own two feet. More than anything else, she felt glad that she hadn’t ended up losing it. Seeing it unchanged made her feel happier above all else. Without any hesitation, she headed straight towards the shop that was her destination. At the entrance, there was an ironwork sign with a strange ocelot shape to it, and a green flag with the design of a flying horse standing on the ground. It was the shop known as the Dancing Ocelot, which served as both a bar and an inn.

Dale and Latina passed through the door side-by-side. The two were overwhelmed by emotions, and in choked voices—

Before they could say “we’re home,” they both ended up getting chewed out.

Bringing a full-grown mythical beast like Hagel into town was no good, sure enough.

As an aside, it was normally the job of the gatekeepers of Kreuz to make sure no dangerous animals made it into town. Accordingly, that meant that the southern gatekeeper had abandoned his duty by letting a large carnivorous mythical beast pass right on by, but...

“Faced with the insane force of two mythical beasts and that former doting idiot, the most frightening hero in the world, what was I supposed to do?” the man himself asserted, and no one could really

blame him.

Dale and Latina were forced to sit penitently on the floor of the Ocelot, while Rita stood before them with her beautiful eyebrows raised in displeasure, her hands on her hips, and her chest thrust forward.

“Really, just how much of a mess are you?” she said, her tone as exasperated and disparaging as always.

Since the Dancing Ocelot was the place where information had gathered, Rita was naturally aware that Latina was the sister of the ruler of Vassilios, and that Dale had been made into a national hero. Even so, the way she dealt with them hadn’t changed in the least. It showed that, rather than the sort of people worthy of such grand titles, she intended to treat them as just Dale and Latina.

When Dale had left this place behind, Rita had told him, “Come on back. We’ll be waiting for you.” Dale thought that she was the only one who could say those words.

And so, the words came forth from Dale so readily that he even surprised himself.

“Rita.”

“What is it?”

“I’m sorry.”

It was exceptionally rare for Dale to earnestly say such a thing to Rita. After Rita got over being so dumbfounded, she made a face like she was more embarrassed for having to hear it.

“Thanks... We’re home.”

“You... made it back, so it’s fine... Welcome home.”

Dale said nothing about how Rita’s words came out so broken up, instead simply smiling. It wasn’t out of ill-will or embarrassment, instead coming from the earnest feelings in the depths of his heart.

“And Latina, I’m always telling you not to go disappearing off on your own, right?” Rita said to Latina, like how she scolded the girl back when she was a child.

She didn’t speak a word of how rough it had been, and spoke as if that long span of absence had never even happened. Rita continued, as if it was only completely natural, “When you’re heading out, you need to tell us where you’re going. You promised, right? We worry when you don’t, you know...”

“Right... I’m sorry, Rita.”

Unlike Dale, Latina couldn’t bring herself to smile. The tears streamed from her eyes, and her shoulders trembled. Even so, she pointed her tear-stained faced at Rita, and somehow managed to force a smile.

“I’m back. I’m sorry, for being gone so long.”

“Welcome home, Latina.”

It was precisely because there was someone here to say “welcome home” that she had been able to say “I’m back.”

The two of them had finally returned to the place where they belonged.

“Sis!” Theo yelled out and ran up to Latina, Kenneth having held him back until Rita’s scolding was finished. He openly didn’t even so much as look at Dale, but it actually felt rather refreshing.

When Latina saw how much bigger Theo had grown and realized all the time she had missed out on spending together with him, the tears flew even more heavily.

“You’re a real crybaby, aren’t you Sis?” Theo said with a laugh and a troubled-looking expression while Latina hugged him tight. He then happily buried his face into Latina’s soft, nice-smelling chest, which Dale was always complimenting.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Theo...!”

“That’s not what you should be saying, right?”

“...I’m back, Theo.”

“Welcome home, Sis.”

Being told such a thing by her “little brother,” there was no way that Latina could stop the tears from flowing. Almost clinging to Theo, Latina started all-out sobbing. Theo’s little hand stroked Latina’s head as if to comfort her, and there was no hint of despair about her weeping.

Caught up in all of that emotion, Rita started crying too, and at some point Kenneth showed up at her side. So that the strong-willed Rita wouldn’t have to let the people around her see her sobbing, Kenneth lent her his chest.

Their tiny toddler at Kenneth’s feet looked at her crying mother and Latina with a bewildered look on her face.

“...Having kids around really makes it stand out, how much time has passed,” Dale said.

“That’s for sure,” Kenneth replied with a peaceful smile, scooping up his tottering daughter with one hand. That girl with the same colored hair as her father had just been a baby who could hardly speak when Dale departed on his journey.

“Well, you got it done, so it’s fine, right?” said Kenneth, at least giving his “little bro” a passing mark.

“...I’m back,” Dale replied, his mouth shifting into a smile.

“Right. Glad to have you back safely.”

Latina looked up, noticing the voices of the two men. Seeing Kenneth there, she desperately wrung out in a still tearful voice, “I’m back.”

“Yeah. The work has been piling up, so I can still count on you to help out, right? ...Welcome home, Latina.”

Watching her father do similarly, the young Emma tried to mimic her parents and brother, saying, “Welkom hoom?”

“I’m back, Emma.”

Latina’s heart was full of joy that she had finally returned to this warm, precious place, glad that she had managed to make it back without losing anyone here.

Without needing to make it public, the news that Latina and Dale had returned spread where it needed to throughout Kreuz. It was thanks to a certain organization in town that such things became more precise in an emergency situation, a civilian non-profit one that was growing at an ominous rate. If they had just disseminated the information, then a group who wanted to catch a glance of the savior of the nation, the Platinum Hero, would gather around. However, not a single such onlooker appeared. It would seem that the information was spread while intentionally avoiding use of the term “Platinum Hero.” At any rate, Dale’s usual trademark was his black magical beast leather coat. His own hair was black with a mix of light brown, and his eyes were also black, making for a rather plain color about him. From the look of him, nothing fit a dazzling word like “platinum.”

For those who knew the truth, however, the name “Platinum Hero” gave a different impression than it did to society at large. It was known all throughout this town that this wasn’t a nickname that came from the platinum armor he wore, but rather came from the way that he only worked for the sake of that girl with her platinum hair, making it rather unfortunate.

And though it was not as significant of a matter, but currently in the backyard of the Ocelot, the number of pups Theo was playing with had grown to two. Those were assuredly simply dogs, not mythical beasts. In fact, the “dog” himself said, “If it is customary that I be treated as a ‘dog,’ then I suppose there is no helping the matter,” so that was what he was.

It was a ridiculous enough idea as to make all the adults avert their eyes, but in the face of the assertion “no matter what anyone says, I am a dog,” they were forced to accept it.

The first one to come running to the Ocelot, before even any of the regulars, was Chloe. She must have abandoned her work in the middle of it, as there were still numerous marking pins stuck in the hem of the everyday dress she wore. For some reason, the now out of breath Chloe was holding a large cushion.

“Chloe...”

“...You...!” Chloe started, swinging the cushion she was holding as soon as she saw Latina, who had moved to greet her best friend. “...big dummy, Latina!” The cushion came down on Latina’s head with a *thwack*.

“Gah!”

A stream of blows from the cushion rained down upon her with a *thwack, thwack*. Apparently Chloe had brought along the cushion to serve as a “weapon.”

“You really, really are a dummy! You kept all your worries to yourself again, and then went running off!”

“I’m sorry! I’m so sorry, Chloe!”

“I told you so many times, that you need to think about the people who worry about you, too!”

The time between cushion blows lessened, turning from a *thwack, thwack* into a *thwackthwackthwack*.

“You dummy! There’s no point in reflecting on what you’ve done if you’re just going to do it again! You really are a dummy!”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

Even so, Latina didn’t try to flee from Chloe’s assault. She simply kept taking her friend’s blows while covering her head.

“Dummy!”

“Gyah!” Latina couldn’t help but yell out in surprise, as Chloe put all of her strength into that final blow from the cushion. But immediately afterwards, she found herself being hugged tight by the girl.

She couldn’t see her face, but even so, Latina could see her friend’s shoulders trembling, though her vision had once more grown blurry with tears.

“Latina, you dummy...”

“I’m sorry, Chloe...”



There were people who worried about her. If she said how happy that made her, though, her friend would just get angry at her again, telling her she didn't need to say anything so obvious. And so, Latina instead said nothing, and kept on hugging her best friend.

They stayed that way, until Chloe finally stopped crying.

"I'm back, Chloe."

"...Welcome home. You really were late in coming back, you dummy...!" she said in a hoarse voice. Though her words were disparaging, they had a ring of kindness to them.

So many customers descended upon the Dancing Ocelot that day that calling it a "full house" wouldn't even begin to cover it. It was the return of that adorable waitress they'd all been waiting for, after all, and none of them were selfless enough to say they'd be satisfied with just catching a glimpse of her. Seeing her so happy precisely because she was busy working brought them joy. And so, it was only obvious that things would turn out like this.

"It won't be possible to manage the bills and orders with things like this."

"It's fine. We'll be having Dale cover everything for today, after all."

"I see. Then I guess it'll be alright."

"You guys are as cruel to me as always, I see."

Through that conversation between the owners of the Ocelot, Dale was briefly and rather informally determined to be sponsoring everything for the day, causing him to look back at them in exasperation.

"You're sure to get two or three rewards from the country at least, right?"

"Still, for you guys to decide that without even asking me..." Dale started to complain.

"Kenneth, Rita, I'll pay for everyone today, to repay everyone for all the worry I caused."

"There's no reason for you to be paying, Latina!" Dale said, quickly withdrawing his complaint after Latina interjected.

Dale wasn't actually annoyed by having to do it. Dale's funds, which he had earned by toiling away and being unable to be all lovey-dovey with Latina, wouldn't take much of a hit by reserving a bar in the rougher part of town for the night.

It seemed like it would get quite busy, so Latina rolled up her sleeves and started briskly working away as the kitchen got into full swing. She put up her hair so it wouldn't get in the way, and she put an apron on over her dress, changing into her "battle gear." The day's menu was made of dishes that could be prepared in large quantities

without needing much preparation. Kenneth handed off finished dishes one after another to Latina, who diligently carried them out with both hands. It was difficult to move about inside the shop, now that it was packed with customers. Even so, Latina displayed no concern as she carried plates with large stacks of food with perfect balance and laid them out on an empty table.

“Little lady, we need some snacks over here too!”

“Right! Just a minute!” she replied in a bright voice, casually grabbing and piling up some empty plates that she saw out of the corner of her eye. When Latina turned around to return to the kitchen, the customers around her made way.

“Latina!”

“Little lady.”

Voices called out to her from all around. Every time she heard her name she smiled with joy from the depths of her heart, and turned to give a lively response of, “Right! I’ll be right there!”

Of course it wasn’t as if they didn’t want to ask about her long absence. But even so, for now, they instead just reflected on the fact that this girl with her brilliant smile had returned.

“Latina, the next round of snacks are done!” Kenneth called out from the kitchen, a ring of enjoyment in his voice, too.

“Right!”

Latina hurried back to the kitchen with light footsteps, left the now empty plates in the sink, and grabbed the freshly completed food. Seeing Latina like that, Kenneth reflexively averted his gaze.

This was the first time since the shop opened that it had been this busy. However, it wasn’t at all distressing. And furthermore, he couldn’t let that girl who was so happily working away see him, the owner, looking so pathetic. It had been quite some time since he’d been filled with such sentiments.

At the storefront counter, Rita was focused entirely on pouring alcohol.

They had brought out several casks for people to drink from as they pleased, but that apparently that alone wasn’t enough to satisfy such heavy drinkers. While tallying up their inventory and the cost in her head, she went to get some more from the back.

“Latina! Sorry, but could you help me bring out a fresh cask?!”

“Right, got it!”

They had a replacement cask out before any of the drunkards could even think to complain. It was too heavy for Rita to move, but Latina was able to use magic to make it a trivial task to bring it into the shop.

“Thanks, Latina.”

“No problem!” Latina replied with a dazzling smile. A gentle grin

crossed Rita's face too in response.

Dale saw this exchange. Everyone wore kind expressions and smiled, with Latina at the center of it all. Just as he had found to be the case for him in the past, just by being around, she had the power to cause those around her to break out in comforted smiles.

And Latina looked happy at the center of them all, too.

Well, that's all I could ask for, Dale thought to himself, then drank down the rest of the contents of his mug.

"Dale!" Latina called out, running to Dale when she was open for just a moment.

"Are you alright? Don't push yourself."

"I'm fine. I'm busy, but I'm having a lot of fun."

When Latina brushed her hair back, the bracelet commemorating their engagement that she wore on her wrist gave off a gleam.

Dale gave a smile and delivered a kiss upon the cheek of that girl he loved more than anyone else in the world. He would not have been able to stop himself if he hadn't settled for just her cheek, so he restrained himself for now.

"Hmm?"

What is it?"

The reason Dale tilted his head then was because a troubadour had pulled out his tool of the trade, despite that normally being taboo in this shop. The people around simply watched, rather than reproaching him.

What he soon started playing was the newest of the epic sagas.

"That's in bad taste..."

In contrast to Dale's thoroughly wrinkled brows, Latina looked like she didn't quite understand. It was the sort of epic that could occur anywhere, with a hero striking down the countless obstacles in his way, including the wicked demon lords themselves, in order to get back the fairy princess, his lover who had been stolen away. It was the sort of thing that it was fine to just ignore, not thinking on it deeply.

While struggling against the urge to flip over the tables around him, Dale somehow managed to hide what he was thinking inside.

"Still, I guess it's alright."

"Hmm?"

Latina tilted her head, only for Dale to embrace her in a hug and smile.

"Tales like this generally end in 'and they lived happily ever after'."

"It's nice when a story has a happy ending, isn't it?" Latina responded with a smile, even though she didn't understand all that well.

"Yeah."

The epic saga approached its climax, and the hero reunited with his beloved princess. If a continuation to this song was made one day, it'd surely be a happy story.

"And we have to make sure we really are happy after that 'happily ever after'..." Dale whispered.

"I'm always happy when I'm with you, Dale," Latina replied, looking just a little embarrassed.

"Well then, we'll just have to stay together forever."

"Yeah."

"And then, the kind-hearted fairy princess lived happily together with her beloved hero."

When the epic saga ended on that note, the pair shared joyous smiles, and locked their lips together as if sealing a vow.

Interlude: The Golden King Faces off with the Deplorable Hero with the Platinum Princess on the Line

Chrysos, the young ruler of Vassilios known as the Golden King and the First Demon Lord, looked at the chamberlain delivering the report with a suspicious gaze. They were currently in the office she used when handling government affairs. Atop her wide desk was a mountain of documents written in complex characters that members of the other races were generally unable to even read.

She had only just recently been enthroned, so the amount of work that lay before her was significant.

A great deal of time had gone by since her predecessor's passing, but in the intervening period before her enthronement, the Banafsaj clergy who ran Vassilios governed based on the prior king's stances. This country had been unaffected by the flow of time for quite a long while now, continuing to carry on the policies of the old regime all the while.

By governing by her own name, Chrysos was enforcing significant reforms for the country of Vassilios. Even so, that fact did not concern Chrysos. After all, it was the dying wish of her mother, the grand priestess in charge of the nation, that the country change. Chrysos was at last able to bring that about, so she found joy in being so busy.

Those reforms also included forging relations with the human race. Chrysos devoted herself to bringing that about, if even a single day sooner. This ended up making her quite a workaholic. Though the reasoning behind it differed, she had rather come to resemble a certain someone.

Rather than the chamberlain, it was the person being reported on that was the source of Chrysos's suspicious gaze. The man by Chrysos's side, providing assistance in these government matters, gave a strained smile upon seeing the Golden King in such a state. He had participated alongside her mother Mov back when she was in charge of government affairs, and Chrysos had known him since she was a child.

"It's rare to see you make such a face, Master."

Devils didn't have family names, so they needed to instead use honorary titles when showing respect. Considering Chrysos's position,

there was hardly anyone left who called her by name. However, her opportunities to hear it said had increased dramatically as of late.

The return of her twin sister Latina, who was so close to her that she could be called Chrysos's other half, was an incredibly significant event for her. At the same time, Latina's return also meant inviting that person who was precious to the girl into the country.

"It is only natural that I would make such a face."

"The Platinum Princess and her hero seem quite affectionate, do they not?"

Chrysos's expression grew all the more displeased with her subordinate's words. He actually found it rather charming to see her let her emotions show so clearly, seeing how she had set her own feelings aside for the sake of pushing forward ever since her enthronement.

"That man... he has only ever been seen exiting out of Platina's room..." Chrysos said with a fixed gaze and an appropriately low tone.

"That's..." the man said, the strained smile returning to his face.

Chrysos had, of course, also prepared a room for Dale. However, there weren't any signs of him using it after tossing his gear and luggage from the trip inside.

There was no need to explain that Dale was eating and sleeping in the villa that presently served as Latina's private room. When she heard that report, a complex expression crossed Chrysos's face, one half out of exasperation, and the other half jealousy.

When they were young, Chrysos and Latina were the most important people in the world to one another. They hardly interacted with anyone else but their parents, and whether they were playing or learning, they were always at each other's side. It was only natural that they would become special to one another. And then, before they had grown enough to become independent, they were torn apart from one another. That great feeling of loss remained as a scar in their hearts even now.

Considering how greatly Chrysos had continued to wish for the return of that other half, it was perhaps only natural that she felt so strongly about that deplorable hero, who was keeping Latina all to himself, that she referred to him as "that man."

"It appears that they really are only sleeping in the same bed, but still..."

With Chrysos's muttering, a complex expression crossed her subordinate's face. Knowing the young Chrysos naturally meant that he had also known Latina when she was a child. He had also been an acquaintance of the twins' parents, so he couldn't help but feel complex emotions over the fact that Latina, who had been so tiny, had found a special man in her life.

The ladies-in-waiting stationed at the villa were those who Chrysos had an especially great deal of trust in. Latina could not be allowed to be seen in public so easily, considering her past as a “criminal” who had been exiled, and the fact she was in a weakened state and couldn’t even properly move. These were women she could trust to take care of even Latina in that state. They were treated as subordinates under Chrysos’s direct supervision, and were granted the right to report to her personally. Lately, she had come to think that that move had been for the very best, though for entirely different reasons than she had expected beforehand. Looking at things from a different perspective, she felt glad that she had not exposed others to the sickeningly sweet, overly lovey-dovey everyday life of her sister and that deplorable hero.

To the ladies-in-waiting and other servants who took care of cleaning the room, as well as replacing and cleaning the sheets and clothes, it was abundantly clear that the pair in the villa were simply passing their time together. Even Chrysos couldn’t help conceding to the deplorable hero on that point. He was clearly acting out of consideration for her sister, who was still not fully healed and needed to recuperate.

The prior information she had received from Sylvia about how they were always making out and flirting with one another was not the sort of thing that a young maiden like Chrysos would care to voice. The way that he exceeded her expectations there forced her to reevaluate her opinion of him, though only a bit.

“The people of the temple seem to have grown vaguely aware of the Platinum Princess’s presence...”

“Well... I suppose it is about time that things would turn out that way.”

Latina had been doing nothing but sleep away in the villa, but lately she had recovered quite a bit, and was now taking strolls about the temple. Her existence and lineage were not known to the majority of those serving in the temple. However, just from looking at Latina, it was obvious at a even just a glance that she had some sort of relation to the current king, Chrysos. The platinum hair that came from their father was rare even in Vassilios, and the two resembled one another so greatly that it was impossible to explain otherwise. Furthermore, their mana wave forms, which devils could naturally see, were nearly identical.

No one would ever imagine that they were entirely unrelated.

Furthermore, just to be sure, Chrysos had gifted her sister with an extravagant, finely crafted headdress, proof of her favor. Latina’s social status was thus rather firmly secured.

“It is becoming common knowledge amongst those of the temple... that in addition to the Platinum Princess and her hero sharing a bed...

that they are doing other utterly baseless things.”

Chrysos’s expression grew bitter in response to her subordinate’s words.

Devils were a race with a matriarchal society, and did not have a custom of men and women getting married and living together. And so, the norm was for men to visit women in their home and ask to try for a child together.

Thanks to the unique circumstances they faced, Chrysos and Latina’s parents were much closer than a usual devil “husband and wife.” Latina had only ever seen her parents in terms of devil couples, and then grew up in a nation of humans, which had a different set of values, but she didn’t realize what sort of effect that had on her impression of such matters.

Chrysos also hesitated to give frank advice to her gentle, absent-minded sister. However, she then decided she could simply give blunt “advice” to the other party involved, an ominous conclusion that hid within it an aloofness that was just like that of her sister.

“Restrain yourself at least a little, you deplorable hero, you,” Chrysos said, disparaging Dale after having invited him into her office.

“You really do treat me terribly.”

“You tried to kill me. For what reason must I treat you in a friendly manner?”

“Well, I guess you’ve got me there...” Dale responded, a strained smile on his face as he didn’t hesitate in the least to take a seat in a nearby chair.

Despite how much they bad mouthed one another, the two of them actually didn’t get along that poorly. Chrysos’s thoughts and sense of values were actually closer to those of Dale than those of Latina, who she was nearly identical to in terms of appearance. And on top of that, the person they cared the most about was the same. Furthermore, they were of the same opinion that they couldn’t ever let the kind-hearted Latina ever see them enjoying plotting away.

Chrysos had asked Latina to be their restraints, but the girl may have in actuality held a bigger role in maintaining world peace than she thought.

“Since you have been staying by Platina’s side around the clock, news of your relationship has more or less spread throughout the temple. You can imagine how that must seem to those who are unaware that Platina is currently being treated, yes?”

Seeing Chrysos’s anger, Dale tried to speculate on what was going on. With that said, though, Dale could only understand enough of the devil language to handle short sentences. He could hardly pick up anything from the conversations of the fluent speakers around him. And furthermore, perhaps because of their high level of

professionalism, the ladies-in-waiting hardly ever talked amongst themselves when before him and Latina. He had hardly heard anything at all when it came to the “assessment of the people around them.”

However, he was still able to hazard a guess, pulling together the information he had heard. When combined with the question Chrysos had asked, he more or less felt he had found the answer, and voiced it to confirm.

“The devil custom is for the man to visit the woman at her home, yeah...? So people think that I’m not just visiting, but slipping in for a bit of action?” He was likely able to speak so crudely before a young woman because of the ill influence of having been around similarly behaved geezers in the bar since he was a youngster himself. Not to mention, since Latina had been raised while exposed to far more dirty jokes and discussions from such middle-aged men than Chrysos, she had a much greater tolerance for such indelicate statements.

Dale didn’t even realize that Chrysos’s gaze grew more and more suspicious of him, truly living up to his reputation as a deplorable hero.

“I do not care how shameless others may think you are, but I will not accept Platina’s virtue being questioned.”

“Ah... So that’s why you told me to ‘restrain myself?’”

“The great majority currently have that impression. And I have no intention of explaining the situation in detail.”

Regardless of what the truth may be, from an objective point of view, it was just no good. That was the reason behind Chrysos’s expression and words, but after thinking for a bit, Dale said without any hesitation, “But still, it’s not like that’ll really disadvantage Latina, right?”

“What?”

“I mean... Does Vassilios have things like political marriages meant to form relationships through the relatives of those in power?”

“It is exceptionally rare for any to be born as close as Platina and myself were... but I cannot deny such a thing as possible.”

“Then me being openly at Latina’s side will serve to ward off anyone stupid enough to think of trying such a thing, right? I mean, there’s no guarantee that some idiot won’t show up and try to pressure Latina into it. There would be plenty of them crawling out of the woodworks, thinking the spoils would go to whoever manages to carry it out and viewing it as a chance to elevate their status.”

“Hrmm...”

Chrysos had been rendered silent, having completely lost the argument. Indeed, she couldn’t completely refute his claims. Being a woman herself, Chrysos had heard such stories in the past from her

mother, who bore great responsibility in the temple.

However, that didn't mean she was completely satisfied on the matter.

"Platina is still not fully recovered. You must never, ever have her push herself."

"It really is a strange feeling, being told stuff like that by someone with the exact same face as Latina..."

Chrysos had added that for emphasis, but Dale's response irritated her. Just whose fault did he think it was that she had to give such ridiculous advice?

"I already said it, but I've been restraining myself properly. And of course I'd never have Latina push herself."

Even so, Chrysos knew that this man put Latina above all else, just as she did.

As such, Chrysos buried the hatchet without ever having truly lifted it to start with.

And then, the next day...

Holding her scepter in place of that hatchet, Chrysos left her office walking in long strides.

According to the lady-in-waiting's report, Latina was completely exhausted and unable to even get up from bed. From the way that the woman's gaze wandered about while she was reporting in, Chrysos was able to guess just what sort of thing had occurred to bring about such a result.

After she had warned him just yesterday, things had ended up as such today. Realizing she had underestimated just *how* deplorable that "deplorable hero" was, Chrysos could almost hear the sound of her own patience snapping.

Sensing Chrysos's rapid approach towards the villa, Dale came out of it. Perhaps having some self awareness, Dale made a somewhat awkward face as he looked at Chrysos.

Dale did have an excuse. He really had restrained himself. That was absolutely, definitely the truth. However, something had occurred to send that self-restraint flying.

Dale and Chrysos had frequently been meeting up and talking without her around, and they would never tell her what they discussed. That was because they were primarily the sort of twisted, deplorable conversation that they could never tell her about. But Latina didn't know that, and had apparently gotten jealous. Reaching a rather ridiculous conclusion that was, nonetheless, just like her, she had asked, "Does Chrysos... have feelings for you...?" Having had the girl he loved so dearly ask him about his relationship with his sister-in-law with an utterly serious look on her face, Dale couldn't help but find himself at a loss for words.

Latina had more jealousy and a desire to keep Dale all to herself than most, so when she saw that Dale and her twin sister were getting along extremely well, she couldn't stop herself from worrying and feeling concerned about what was going on between them. She didn't want to share Dale with anyone, even if that person was Chrysos. However, she also didn't want her relationship with Chrysos to deteriorate, either. Dale and Chrysos were both precious to her, so the situation unnerved Latina greatly.

Meanwhile, though Dale had been left dumbfounded initially, he was aware that Latina had a bad habit of getting caught up in her own negative thoughts. Even so, he did feel a little irritated, being suspected of infidelity that he never even committed. Naturally, he found no amusement in the situation.

However, seeing Latina so clearly jealous wasn't so bad. She was displaying such emotions precisely because she cared for him so deeply. Dale was able to immediately turn his mindset around because he was an incredibly positive thinker when it came to Latina, and his thoughts shifted to how he could clear away her unease.

He ended up taking action, self-restraint be damned.

All of that was what Dale asserted, at least, but the whole of his reasoning had been that Latina had been even more adorable than even he had expected.

"Umm... We did it, I guess?" Dale said with an awkward smile. In response, Chrysos landed a blow with her scepter, without even the slightest hint of hesitation. Dale moved to dodge in an instant, only to hear the sound of it rushing by right next to his ear. It didn't end with just that one blow or another, instead turning into an all-out onslaught of consecutive strikes from Chrysos's scepter.

"Gah...! That was close...! You're seriously trying to hit me, aren't you?!"

Paying no heed to Dale's angry shout, Chrysos readjusted her grip on her scepter and took another full swing with it. There was no wavering in the movement of her torso, so if Dale hadn't dodged, it would have surely been a direct hit.

With a sneer of "Hmph," Chrysos puffed up her slight chest in a somehow pompous manner.

"You would not possibly perish from even countless blows from these slender arms of mine."

"Hahaha! That's true! I may not even get hurt! But even so, I've got a sense of pain, and it sure would smart if you landed one of those!" Dale yelled back, facing off with the girl grasping her scepter as they both looked for an opening. However, as if growing impatient, Chrysos soon brandished her weapon.

"And hey! A royal scepter isn't the sort of thing you should be

treating as a mace!”

“This is the item I am most used to holding!”

Dale ducked down, and the metallic scepter flew by over his head. The ornamentation on the scepter gave off an elegant *swish*, unfitting to this scene.

There was a bridge in front of the villa crossing the spring surrounding it. It was a beautiful place, but now it had become the stage of a one-on-one duel between a hero and demon lord. There was a great gap between the image those words implied and the reality of the situation, but the words absolutely were accurate, only adding to the confusion and disappointment.



“Even though Platina is in the midst of recovering...! What do you think you’re doing?!”

“Huh...?! Well, you know...” Dale said, his cheeks a little flushed. Apparently he was still feeling a little self-conscious about the subject.

“Even someone like myself, who is not fluent in Western Continental, can see that you are not reflecting on your actions!” Chrysos said, raising her voice and continuing on with her assault. Chrysos was an expert when it came to magic, but she was a complete and utter amateur in terms of physical combat. It was incredibly easy for Dale to dodge her attacks. With that said, though, he wasn’t able to get rough with Chrysos, and that feeling was only strengthened by the realization that he was at fault.

“I’m telling you, Latina was just too cute, so there was no helping it!”

“Do not lay the blame on Platina!”

Hearing them shouting at one another, Latina tottered to the entrance of the villa, her face beet red as she looked at them. She had apparently surpassed the limits of what she could endure.

“This is embarrassing, so cut it out already...!” she said in a voice that was frail, but also clearly conveyed her assertion.

“Both of you, Dale, Chrysos... you really need to just—”

“Latina, you’re up?!”

“Waaaah!”

Latina wasn’t able to get out the entirety of her assertion. Dale had quickly dodged, then hugged her and rubbed his cheeks up against hers.

“You damned deplorable hero...!”

By using her beloved sister as a shield, he had sealed off any further attacks from Chrysos. The demon lord ground her teeth at his cowardly tactics.

The hero in question had no intention of using her as a shield, but as the demon lord squirmed, struggling to break free of his grasp, he whispered into her ear in a sweet voice, as if continuing on with his intimate words from last night, “You really are cute, Latina...”

“Dale, Chrysos is right there...”

“Hmm... I don’t really mind...”

“You should!” Latina yelled out, her face bright red as she pushed off him desperately with her legs. Dale’s actions really made one want to ask if he really knew the meaning of the term “self-restraint.” Her bashfulness was an extremely natural reaction.

Having seen that sickeningly over-sweet sight, Chrysos was left displaying an empty stare. Her brain had simply frozen up.

And so, half-reflexively, Chrysos muttered something that would

cause even her to wonder, when she later returned to her senses, what she had been thinking: "...Are you intending to embrace Platina to death...?"

Latina was the one to react to those words. After leaping up in surprise, she started struggling far more violently to escape. By their nature, there were very few things that could threaten the life of a demon lord. Though lower-ranking, they were gods, and were protected by the rules of the world. The only thing that could overturn that was the power of those known as heroes. Understanding what that meant, Latina was struggling in a panic. Not noticing the doubtful expression on Dale's face, she let slip, "I don't...!"

"You don't...?" Dale asked back, then before she could even think it through Latina shouted out, "I don't want to die from sex...!"

"That sure is an awful remark to make."

"It would be an unprecedented cause of death for a demon lord, but I cannot say that such a thing would be impossible," Chrysos said with a scornful, disgusted look, immediately agreeing with Latina. Dale chose to ignore that matter, though.

"I mean, Dale... you're a hero, right?!"

"Yeah, I guess."

"You'll crush me... My body won't—"

"If you're going to be that unreasonable, then you'll need to be punished."

Latina looked like a young child, tears beginning to form in her eyes. Dale wrinkled his brows a bit, gave a sigh, and then picked her up. Latina braced herself, but that was hardly enough to resist this hero, who was so out of the ordinary.

"I won't kill you like that, and I'll be sure to do it right, so let's go over that way and talk things over properly."

"Chrysos... Chrysos, save me...!"

Chrysos very much wanted to respond to her sister's call for help, but she didn't have it in her to charge into someone else's sleeping quarters. Furthermore, she couldn't think of any way to possibly stop that deplorable hero. Her thoughts had crawled to a stop and she was left exhausted, as if all energy had been drained from her body.

"Right... I wish you luck in battle, Platina."

"“Luck in battle”? That's not—!"

Leaving those words behind, Latina was carried into the depths of the villa.

Having seen her sister off, Chrysos's expression looked utterly devoid of energy as her shoulders drooped and she gave a sigh. She was tempted by the desire to throw her scepter aside in frustration, but she somehow restrained herself.

It was an extremely difficult question for Chrysos, whether or not

she was fond of Dale as a person. It wasn't as though she hated him. If she did, she wouldn't ever have private conversations with him, nor would she permit him to use her name. In fact, she valued Dale highly enough that she was willing to entrust him with her sister, her other half who was more precious to her than anyone else.

She was also grateful to him for killing the Second Demon Lord, that especially hated enemy even amongst the Demon Lords of Calamity, who was the reason they had lost their parents.

But on the other hand, Chrysos had seen how truly deplorable Dale could be. Rather, she hadn't ever really seen him be any other way. Ever since he got Latina back, Dale had been *completely and utterly* deplorable the whole time he had been in Vassilios. There wasn't a trace of the sort of cool, charming protagonist exalted in a heroic epic.

As a young maiden, there was nothing Chrysos could say favorably about him, no matter what bizarre circumstances might come about.

While thinking the incredibly rude thought about her sister's beloved of, *Well, they say love is blind*, Chrysos trudged back to her office. No one was around to point out how strange her attempt to rest and refresh herself by returning to work was.

As a result, Chrysos came to regard Dale as part of the reason for Latina's treatment being prolonged.

3: Prequel: The Platinum-haired Guru and the Purple-haired Lady Oracle

It was a day like any other. Knowing just how precious such a thing was, Latina was now enjoying her days full of even more bliss than before. Dale felt the same when looking at her in their attic room in the Ocelot, letting her hair down now that all the work for the day was over and combing it while using her favorite pomade. He caught ever so slight, fleeting glimpses of her broken horns, which were normally hidden, as she moved it about. Latina's hair reflected the pale light feeling the room, giving off an incredibly gentle platinum shine.

Dale then remembered someone whose hair gave off a shine of the same color.

"Hey, Latina."

"What is it?"

"You and Chrysos are definitely twins, right?"

"That's right. Why are you asking, all of the sudden?"

Chrysos and Latina resembled one another so greatly that it would be impossible for anyone who saw them to doubt they were related by blood. When Latina was staying in Vassilios, the same was true of Chrysos's subordinates, her chamberlain and demons, who didn't need to be introduced to infer who she was.

"I mean, your eye color is different and all... so it was just bugging me."

Normally, identical twins wouldn't be born with different eye colors. However, they looked far too similar to be fraternal twins.

"It's because only Chrysos was born with a mana trait... My gray eyes are different from both our parents, but I was told they probably came from Mov's side of the family."

"I see..."

Having met Latina's mother, Mov, in person, Dale was satisfied with that answer, but Latina didn't notice that. After a moment of trepidation, that fact left Dale a bit relieved. He had told Latina's sister, Chrysos, that he'd been present for their mother's death, but he still hadn't told Latina directly. They had decided not to hide things from one another, but the matter of Mov's death still weighed heavily

on Dale's heart.

I know I should tell her properly, but...

It was no easy task to tell the girl he loved that he was the one to kill her mother.

Latina's mother, Mov, had mana traits, brilliant colors that didn't appear naturally in a race that showed themselves in those with strong mana. Her long purple hair was brilliant enough to steal away one's gaze, but her eye color was also a mana trait. Just like Chrysos, they were a beautiful gold.

"You said that your hair color was the same as your father's, right, Latina?"

"Yeah, Rag's was the same color. Rag's horns, too... they were also pitch black. The shape of mine was the same as Mov's, though. Devils inherit their parents' horn shapes and colors separately."

"I see."

Latina gently touched the place where she had lost her horn and broke out in a gentle smile.

"I broke off something I had inherited from my parents... so I do regret it a little. But I can only afford to have such thoughts because I'm so happy now."

"Latina..."

"It made Chrysos really sad, too... We had a matching set of horns, but I lost both of mine..."

"If I had paid a little more attention back then, things would have turned out differently..."

"It's not your fault, Dale!" Latina hurriedly blurted out. Dale gently stroked the place where her horn would be, as if comforting a child, but even so, Latina closed her eyes contentedly.

"There's nothing to be done of it now, so... there's no point in saying if only this or that at this point, right?"

"Yeah."

"Latina."

Latina tilted her head in confusion at him calling out her name, only for Dale to throw out a question he had been wanting to ask for quite some time.

"Your parents... what sort of people were they?"

"...We heard before that devil mothers are the ones to raise their children, but Chrysos and I were raised by Rag... Mov was always busy, after all."

She possessed an extremely uncommonly powerful divine protection granted by Banafsaj, earning her the title of "Lady Oracle."

"I think that Rag was a teacher. He shouldn't have received any divine protection from Asfar, but I could tell just from looking that there were a lot of people who respected him..."

It was precisely because he lacked any special power that he was able to teach and admonish a great many people, granting him the honorary title of “guru.”

“The lifestyle I knew in Vassilios was so incredibly restrictive. I was only allowed to stay in the depths of the temple, spending time with my parents and Chrysos, after all...”

Those days were spent hidden away deep within that temple, as if they were living within a miniature garden, but there were surely happy times amongst them.

This was a story taking place before our tale.



Devils didn't have family names the way that humans did. They didn't have a custom of marriage to start with, and their society had a matriarchal basis, so their family structures differed completely from those of the other races. Instead, they used the name of their mother and were called “So-and-so's child.”

Even when they shared a mother, it was rare for siblings to also share a father, and it wasn't at all rare enough for the difference in ages between them to be more akin to what one would expect between a parent and child when it came to humans.

The fact that while their time as children and the elderly was the same as humans, their time as adults was many times longer, surely had an effect on that. As was always the case with the long-lived races, their birth rates were low, but in exchange they had a very long time in which they could reproduce. In fact, that time was so very long that they tended to put a very different emphasis on age difference than other races.

Furthermore, the First Demon Lord and his retainers, or in other words the temple of Banafsaj, had maintained the government's structure without any changes for over a hundred years, making society quite static for the people living there.

That was the sort of country that Vassilios was.

Vassilios had a town of the same name at its center, with small scale villages and the like scattered about. It existed in a harsh environment, a land where it was most certainly not easy to live. But the devils were a hardy race, and they didn't need much food to survive, so they were able to live even in such a place. It also helped quite a bit that all of its citizens could use magic, and so Water magic was most certainly not rare in the least. Even if it didn't rain, they didn't need to worry about thirst.

The great temple in the only town in the nation, where the king's throne lay, was the greatest even amongst the temples of Banafsaj from which Vassilios was governed.

The sunlight reflecting off of the stone-paved path provided it a white hue. It was originally created to prevent the arid wind from stirring up dust, but it also served to reinforce the sense of purity the town had. There wasn't even a single speck of dirt on the path because it was periodically washed clean with Water magic. As a public service, magic was cast to lower the temperature of the entire town midday, when the weather was at its hottest.

Even so, there were few who walked about town at such an hour.

"Guru."

One young man amongst those passersby stopped and turned to look towards the source of that voice. His uncommon platinum hair swayed. His black horns were on the small side for a man, without a hint of manliness or ferocity about them. It was as if his gentle personality was reflected in his appearance.

"Ah, Aspida. It's been a while, hasn't it?"

"Indeed it has."

The owner of the voice, the young man called Aspida, was clad in high quality priest's garb, signifying that he served as one of the officials who ruled over the town. And yet, he respectfully bowed his head to the other man, who was wearing extremely ordinary commoner's clothing.

No age difference could be seen between the two men, in terms of appearance. However, it was impossible to tell the age difference between devils, their heads crested with horns, just by looking.

"It really has been ages. Has it been... 20 years now already, since you were my student?"

"Yes. I'm glad to find you doing well, Guru."

"There are things that I wouldn't call all that well, though, as always."

There wasn't a hint of overbearingness to the man being called "Guru," with his calm smile and gentle green eyes, and the slender contours of his body. However, the man named Aspida's respect towards him never faltered.

"Is your work at the temple going smoothly?"

"About that... there's something I wanted to discuss with you, Guru."

From the frown on his pupil's face, the Guru, Smaragdi, sensed that this wasn't the sort of conversation to be had on a street corner.

"Well then, shall we discuss this in my house? It seemed you were heading there before, right?"

"Is that alright?"

"I'm not busy enough for something like that to be a problem," Smaragdi said with a laugh, then started walking, leading the way for Aspida.

As they moved away from the main landmark of the town, the great temple of Banafsaj, their surroundings took on a much rougher feel. The modest houses built of sun-dried bricks had been exposed to such sunlight that they had become a shade of white that made it look as though they had been bleached. One such dwelling amongst them belonged to Smaragdi.

The inside had been furnished only to the bare minimum degree necessary, making it look almost dreary. However, that was an incredibly ordinary way for men in this country to live.

In the parched climate of this land, just getting out of the sun and into a place where the wind passed through was enough to bring the effective temperature down significantly. Having taken a seat in the chair offered to him, Aspida felt a cool breeze pass through and breathed a sigh of relief. Smaragdi then placed a cup down in front of him and filled it with water from a pitcher. It was still cold, so Aspida inferred that it hadn't been drawn from one of the water stations about town.

"So... what did you want to talk about?"

"Are you aware that there's a priestess in the shrine now who is called the 'Lady Oracle'?"

Smaragdi tilted his head a bit in response to Aspida's question.

"She's still supposed to be very young, isn't she? I've heard the rumors about town that she has an exceptionally rare level of divine protection, but... is something the matter with her?"

"To be honest, Guru, I was wondering if you would be willing to act as her teacher..."

Smaragdi only looked all the more puzzled with those words. In addition to being places of religion, the temples of Banafsaj in Vassilios also served as an administrative body. The priests who served in the foremost amongst them, the great temple, served as top officials of the government, so there should be countless people there who were exceptionally capable. Smaragdi couldn't see a need to call on someone like himself who lived out in town.

"I know, it's no surprise for you to find it odd," Aspida said, seemingly having expected Smaragdi's confusion. He continued on to explain, "The one in charge of teaching magic to young priestesses in the temple is Ms. Gnósi, but... currently, the Lady Oracle is terrified of members of the same sex."

Smaragdi's eyebrow raised a bit. It would be one thing if it was towards members of the opposite sex, but there must have been some sort of reason behind a sudden fear of the same sex developing. He couldn't think of any such reason immediately, though.

"However, the male instructors, they all look a bit... rough. We couldn't really entrust the now frightful young Lady Oracle to them."

“Couldn’t you handle it?”

Aspida had a masculine appearance, but he didn’t look especially intimidating. But in response to Smaragdi’s question, he silently shook his head back and forth.

“Ever since the Lady Oracle started refusing Ms. Gnósi, those of us who studied magic have been tasked with teaching her, but to be honest, it’s too much for us.” It was just a bit, but some earnest surprise showed on Smaragdi’s face upon hearing that reply. He was well aware of the capabilities of his pupil, and he had thought that Aspida should have been more than enough to serve as a teacher.

Magic studies worked a bit differently from other fields of learning.

Even in Vassilios, the majority of all teachers were priests of Asfar, the same as in other countries. That wasn’t because it was impossible to do the job without being one, but because those with Asfar’s divine protection devoted themselves to their studies, and in turn had a strong trend of idolizing the path of teaching others.

Smaragdi didn’t have divine protection from Asfar. The “magical studies” that he made his livelihood teaching didn’t include just the basis for using magic, but also the techniques to manipulate mana, and the ways to increase precision and control. In a way, his profession could be referred to as a “professional trainer” for magic.

In devil society, magic was closely linked to day-to-day life. Those born with strong mana needed the technique to control it, while those who only had weak mana sought to gain fine, delicate methods for raising their efficiency. And so, they wished to learn the related high-level techniques.

“And so... I thought that your personality and skills would be more than enough, and a gentle person such as yourself wouldn’t frighten the Lady Oracle... and so I want to suggest you to my superiors, for their approval. Won’t you consider it?”

“...What happened, Aspida?” Smaragdi asked in a sufficiently forceful tone to make Aspida sit back up straight. If he was nothing but a soft, overly kind instructor, he never would have earned enough respect to be called “Guru.” No matter how gentle he may have been by nature, Smaragdi also possessed a firm, unshakable core. Aspida was also well aware of that fact.

“If the Lady Oracle, who has been hidden away in the depths of the temple, was trying to keep her distance from members of the opposite sex, that would be one thing. But it’s clearly something strange, for her to only deal with men, and for those around her to acknowledge that.”

With Smaragdi readdressing his concern, Aspida no longer tried to conceal the truth more than was necessary. For his request to be

accepted, he needed to report on the matter.

He showed a bit of hesitation in doing so, but in a low voice, Aspida spoke the reason. "The Lady Oracle... the other day, she was attacked by the Second Demon Lord."

Smaragdi gave a faint gulp. He was well acquainted with the story of that gleeful murderer killing the First Demon Lord who had previously ruled the nation.

"The Lady Oracle was unharmed, but... a young child the same age as her was murdered right before her eyes..."

"That's..."

Someone she knew had been killed right in front of her. That alone would be more than enough to scar her. He didn't even need to think about how much of a burden it had been on her mind for that young girl to be confronted with that being, who was like terror incarnate.

As an instructor, Smaragdi had come into contact with a great many children up until now, and so, just thinking of her caused his heart to ache.

"Apparently, the Second Demon Lord looks like a young girl."

"Then..."

"I'd have to imagine that she instinctively recalls the Second Demon Lord. The Lady Oracle won't say anything herself, but... that just makes it all the more pitiful."

Aspida's words caused a feeling of sympathy for that girl he had never even met to wash over Smaragdi. He earnestly wanted to do something for the sake of that child.

"That's... truly heartbreaking, isn't it?"

"Will you think about it?"

"Still, no matter how much you may recommend me, won't it be difficult for an outsider like myself to be allowed into the depths of the temple?"

Taking Smaragdi's words as acceptance, a look of relief crossed Aspida's face.

"You needn't worry about that. I'll come for you again in the future, so I'll be counting on you when that time comes," Aspida said and then took his leave. After seeing him off, Smaragdi picked up the cup and drank the water in it, which had now grown warm. Aspida may have spoken lightly, but Smaragdi still thought it would be difficult to carry out. Even so, he couldn't help but become curious as to just how much talent that girl they called the Lady Oracle, who they treated with such respect, must possess.

And so, when Aspida really did visit at a later date and they passed into the depths of the great temple together, Smaragdi genuinely was quite surprised. He had been invited into a part of the

temple that clearly differed from the parts the townsfolk were allowed to visit. The temple was built with several structures within it and was divided into several layered sections. As they progressed deeper inside the security grew stricter, and the temple began to develop a sense of detachment from the transient world at large.

Eventually, Smaragdi lost count of even the number of corners they had turned and how many rooms they had passed through. Around that point, they arrived at a room that somehow exuded a sense of emptiness, despite the sparsity of furnishings common to Vassilios.

In that otherwise monochromatically white room, a single fragment of color stood in stark contrast with its surroundings. It was a young woman, still of an age where she should be called just a girl. She had an innocent, childish look about her, but her golden eyes had a distinct look of resignation to them, as if they'd seen all of the despair and hopelessness of the world. It somehow managed to overpower her otherwise youthful appearance.

Her long hair was a brilliant purple, lacking even a trace of dirt or blemish.

There was no need to explain. Just from seeing that beautiful purple, the color of Banafsaj, it was obvious even at a glance that this was the Lady Oracle, so deeply beloved by that god.

She looked at Smaragdi, her expression not shifting in the least. Her coldly shining golden gaze pierced through Smaragdi, without showing any signs of being shaken by this unknown visitor or even speculating as to his identity.

“Leave this place.”

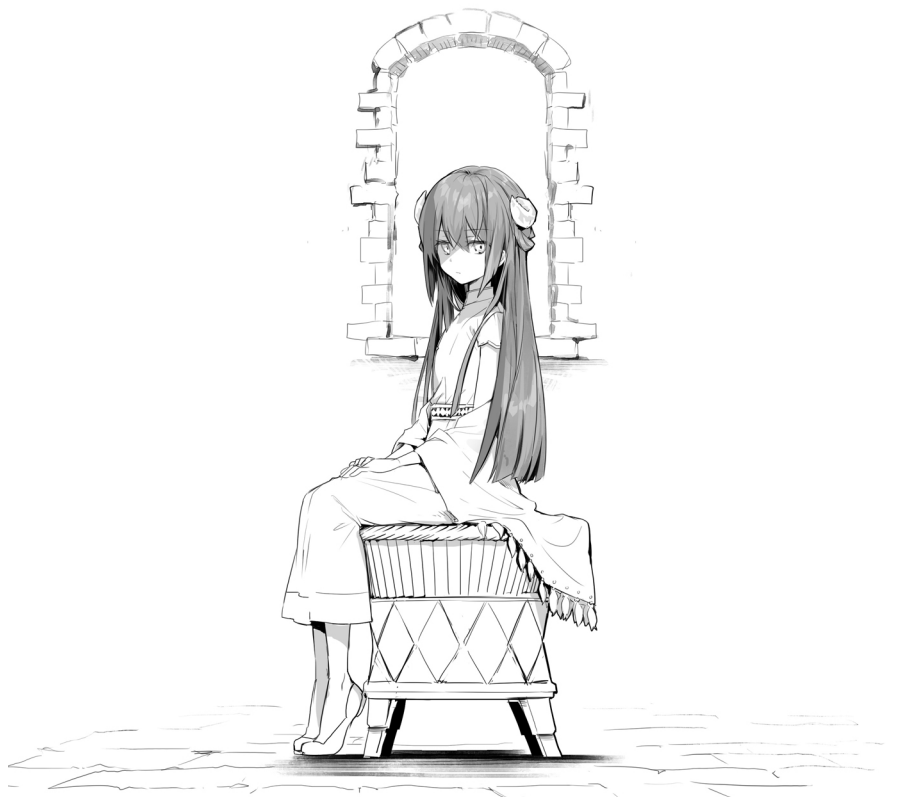
The Lady Oracle's words signified that she had rejected him. That cool, flat tone, which none would ever expect from her youthful outer appearance, reverberated quietly throughout the empty, silent space.

“Becoming involved with me will mean your death. Leave this place.”

Despite this, or perhaps precisely for that very reason, Smaragdi got the feeling that he mustn't abandon this girl. He felt that flat, emotionless tone was actually the result of her desperately fighting her feelings.

“...Death comes for us all eventually. I believe that until that time comes, we have to try to leave something of value behind.” With a gentle look in his green eyes and a smile on his face, Smaragdi accepted even this prophecy of his own death. Seeing that, the Lady Oracle's stoic expression was shaken by surprise, letting a bit of the childishness fitting of her age shine through.

This was the first meeting between Smaragdi and the girl driven to despair by her ability to see the countless futures that could occur.



As soon as he saw her, Smaragdi could tell why his pupil had been searching so hard for a magic instructor. To start with, it was exceptionally rare for mana traits, colors not normally possessed by a race, to manifest in multiple places. Not all people with high levels of mana possessed a mana trait, but all who had mana trait were born with a great deal of mana.

It was difficult to handle great power. But if one wasn't able to restrain it, then they would be at the mercy of their own power.

Her power was so great that it had been necessary to have her undergo training since she was very young. Learning how to manipulate mana and cast magic was a matter that could not be avoided for devils, as it was tied to their everyday life.

"Pleased to meet you."

The Lady Oracle's expression shifted to one of bewilderment in response to Smaragdi's words. She couldn't understand how he could still offer such a gentle smile, even after being rejected and told he was fated to die.

Seeing the Lady Oracle like that concerned Smaragdi, and his smile shifted to a frown.

"Though... I can't imagine they'd let an outsider like me serve the Lady Oracle so easily..." Smaragdi muttered with a sigh. Those words flowed forth so smoothly that Smaragdi realized he was already completely set on becoming involved with this young, tiny "Lady Oracle." He decided that he couldn't possibly abandon a girl with such a look in her eyes.

"I don't believe you need to worry about that, Guru," Smaragdi's pupil replied.

"Aspida."

"Several priests with divine protection from Banafsaj have acknowledged that you will come to serve the Lady Oracle."

Smaragdi's brow wrinkled slightly in response to Aspida's words. Glimpsing over at the girl herself, Smaragdi saw that the Lady Oracle wasn't questioning Aspida's words.

So this is the temple's way of thinking, is it...? The temple has continued to govern for a long time since the passing of the previous king, but to think that things had grown so distorted...

Smaragdi didn't possess any divine protection.

Vassilios was ruled by the temple and the demon lord selected by the gods, so its people possessed deeper faith than those of other nations. But precisely because he lived out in the town, he questioned the idea of prioritizing the will of the gods in all matters.

And above all else, he had misgivings about the way the people of the temple didn't question anything as long as it was the will of the

gods.

Entrusting everything to prophecies granted by the power of the gods... Normally, it would be impossible to have absolute trust in someone you never even met... To not even have any doubts about that...

The way that divine protection from Banafsaj manifested itself was the gift of prophecy. Smaragdi was of course aware of that. However, he still found it greatly worrying for them to rely on that alone. If you could declare that something was secure because it had been prophesied, then there was the danger that someone could be convicted of a crime from a single prediction even if they hadn't done a thing.

As a priestess with high-ranking divine protection, the girl before him now would later come to play a great role in the temple. In that case, as a teacher, he may have been able to imbue a different sense of values in her than those of the temple.

Behind his gentle smile, Smaragdi was thinking about what he could accomplish by getting involved with this girl.

†

The Lady Oracle's name was Mov, a word that meant "purple."

When Smaragdi heard her age, he was a little surprised. From her outer appearance alone Mov looked a little younger, but on the other hand, her expression seemed so terribly mature, making her seem to be older than her actual age.

Devils were a long lived race, and they spent a relatively long time as adults. As someone who still had some time before he entered old age but had already lived for quite a while, he found those who were still young quite charming.

With magic, one first designates an element, then make a declaration under their name to exercise control, then after vocalizing the effect to occur, one declares the keyword in the form of its spell name. Without that process, the spell will not activate. Alongside that, mana control techniques were also desired.

What Smaragdi taught Mov were matters related to the spells in the Holy and Dark attributes that she could use, as well as delicate mana control techniques.

"You're rather good at memorizing things, aren't you, Mov?" Smaragdi said in a gentle tone, only for Mov to cast her gaze downwards a bit. She had a look saying she rejected him when they first met, so Smaragdi hadn't thought she would open her heart to him easily. But looking at her, it would seem that she had acknowledged his abilities as an instructor.

In terms of pure talent, Mov is far above me... I'm just more knowledgeable about handling my power because I've lived so much longer.

Those thoughts were his true feelings, rather than mere self-deprecation.

Lacking in physical strength and possessing below-average levels of mana, he far from excelled as a specimen of the devil race. That was how he assessed himself. Because he possessed the capability to calmly make assessments, he was able to accurately grasp the reality of things.

Rather than letting that humble him, he instead focused his attention on learning to most effectively employ the power he did have, gaining a depth of knowledge in the process, which was a “talent” in its own way. And because he knew frustration and envy towards those with natural ability, that made him especially well-suited to teaching others.

While he instructed Mov, Smaragdi learned the details of just what had happened to her. That was proof that the gap between them was closing bit by bit, but he couldn't simply feel happy about that. After all, it was tied to learning her heartrending past.

Though Mov was a priestess with a high level of divine protection, she had apparently been tasked with serving at the side of a certain child in the depths of the temple. It would seem the reason was because they were the closest in age, but Smaragdi could hazard a guess as to just who it would have to be to have someone as respected as the “Lady Oracle” serving them. And it was precisely because of his realization that he understood he shouldn't broach the subject carelessly. After all, that child had become a victim of the Second Demon Lord.

“I could not do anything... Even though they call me the ‘Lady Oracle’... I was unable to protect even a single person...” Mov muttered with a sigh. Smaragdi sensed from those words just how deeply that had scarred her.

She wasn't just tormented by the terror of the murder, but also her feelings of helplessness in regards to her own ability.

Smaragdi gently smiled, listening to all her complaints and grumbling. The time slipped by slowly and quietly for the two of them together here in this room in the temple, where a cool breeze blew through.

“...Have you been here in the temple all your life, Mov?”

Seeing her give a nod in response to his question, Smaragdi stroked Mov's hair. “I see... You've really given it your all, haven't you?” he said in a kind voice, only for Mov to grab tightly on to his sleeve. This was a habit she'd been repeating from time to time as of late.

“It's true that you possess a greater power than me, Mov, and may even have the strongest divine protection of anyone in the temple...

but you're still just a child, right?" His voice was so very gentle and kind. The green color of his eyes was like that of fresh leaves, and they had a warmth about them like spring sunlight.

"It makes us adults happy, when we get to pamper children."

Devils would only allow those who were very close to them to touch the areas near their horns. But at some point, she had come to accept Smaragdi even touching her golden horns themselves.

The girl... she's still so young, but she's had the responsibility of a full-grown priestess thrust upon her...

Smaragdi held back a sigh that almost slipped out without him even thinking about it. That wasn't how he should be presenting himself to the girl before him now.

For devils, a few years wasn't at all a long amount of time. But even so, it was sufficient for a child to grow up quite a bit.

Seeing his excellent pupil Mov now earned a clear reaction from her teacher, Smaragdi. The assignments he gave her were most certainly not trivial tasks, but even so, she handled them with deceptive ease. However, that all led Smaragdi to one particular conclusion.

"There may not be all that much left for me to teach you."

Mov looked shocked in response to those words, which were said in a kind tone but clearly declared their parting. It was rare for her to ever let her emotions show that clearly. That was proof of just how much she had come to rely on Smaragdi over these last few years, and how he soothed her heart.

Seeing Mov so pained troubled Smaragdi as well. He felt like his determination was about to waver, but on the other hand, he was starting to grow concerned over the sense of relief simply seeing Mov had begun to bring him.

"You're not as afraid of women as you used to be, right?"

"But..."

"You should study under all sorts of people, not just me."

Smaragdi's expression grew clouded, seeing Mov grasp his sleeve so tightly. Rather than trying to shake her off, he gently placed his hand over hers.

"You'll come to hear a great many voices and meet many people. Even if it's just in the narrow confines of this shrine, please don't limit your world further by trying to only ever involve yourself with me and me alone."

It had been expected that Mov would come to rely on Smaragdi as he strived to watch over her and help heal the deep wounds of her heart.

He didn't want to abandon her. However, this child would come to hold a great deal of authority in the temple. It wouldn't do for her

to become dependent on anyone, blindly trusting their words.

Mov was approaching the end of her childhood and becoming an adult woman. Taking that fact into account as well, he felt that now was the time to put an end to things.

“Though with that said, it’s not as though I have *nothing* left to teach you. It won’t be for such long periods as it’s been up until now, but I’ll still stop in at the temple from time to time.”

“Really...?”

“I’ll definitely keep coming to see you, so be sure not to push yourself *too* hard.”

He had realized that Mov’s voice was quivering. Even so, Smaragdi made sure to smile, so that it wouldn’t be too heartbreaking. It was a little awkward, but Mov smiled back at him.

Just as he had promised, even after he decided to distance himself from her, Smaragdi made periodic visits to the temple. It wasn’t the kind of intimate time together the two had shared in the past, with both sides instead clearly maintaining the distance appropriate for entertaining a visitor. As the next grand priestess, she was escorted by a chamberlain as if it was only natural, and didn’t get close enough for any friendly contact.

Even so, Smaragdi thought that that was necessary.

As Mov grew, so did the number of people who unjustly suspected Smaragdi of trying to grab hold of power through her. That wasn’t his intention at all, though. The current distance he had taken, watching over her as she grew into an intelligent young lady, felt appropriate to Smaragdi. That had surely been the sensible, logical decision to make.

It was only natural that they were teacher and pupil, and that was the relationship he was trying to maintain.

That was shaken a few years later, when Mov had stopped maturing and fully become an adult, on a certain day, late at night.

Sensing someone’s presence, Smaragdi lifted his gaze from the book he had in hand. Fitting to the commonly held values of the devil race, his dwelling was almost entirely an empty space. The only things he’d count as having value were the books related to his profession that he had gathered over a long period of time. However, almost all of those were simply copies. It was highly unlikely that a burglar would purposefully target this man’s dwelling in the rougher part of town. Even so, he took hold of the gnarled staff he normally never used, just to be safe. An expert in magic control like Smaragdi didn’t need such a tool to assist him, but it was only natural for him to want to keep such a thing close at hand, on the off chance it became necessary to use it as a weapon to beat his opponent with.

“Smaragdi...”

However, the small voice he heard from outside at that time truly

caught Smaragdi off guard. It had come from a visitor he had never expected. Even having guessed at the owner of that voice, he couldn't completely shake his disbelief when he opened the door. And even when his expectations were confirmed, he couldn't wipe the look of astonishment from his face.

Amongst the dark of night, her brilliant purple hair and the silk she wore covering her head shone dimly in the pale light from inside the room. That silk headdress would normally be used to guard against the strong midday sunlight, but instead that accessory was being used to hide her eye-catchingly dazzling long hair, except for the bit that could be seen at the sides of her face.

She was supposed to be concealed away in the depths of the temple, but here she was in town, without even a single escort, in the dead of night. And she had known where his house was... There were countless questions he wanted to ask her. However, Smaragdi held back those words.

Just as he had done when she was a child, with a gentle smile and a kind tone, he called out to her. "What's wrong, Mov?"

With that question alone, the tears she held back started flowing freely as she sobbed away. With her movements, the silk slipped off her head and fell to the floor. The silver ornamentation dangling from her now exposed golden horns sparkled in the light alongside her overflowing tears.

Smaragdi could not help but feel unnerved, seeing Mov sob as her shoulders trembled slightly. If he was going to treat her as a woman, then it wouldn't do to invite her into his home so lightly. However, he certainly shouldn't turn a girl who was unfamiliar with town away late at night.

Smaragdi opened the door to his home wide, deciding to postpone the decision on what to do till later, focusing on first stopping her crying.

"Something happened, right? If I'll do, then would you care to discuss it with me?"

Looking like a child, she gave a nod and entered in through the door she was being invited through. As she sat down in the chair offered to her, the bright colors about her instantly brightened up the otherwise plain room.

Now fully visible in the light of the room, Mov's tears slowed from the relief of seeing Smaragdi, and it was like all the tension drained from her body. Noticing that, Smaragdi also felt a little relieved too.

"Oh water, please grant my wish by my name and show yourself.
《Manifestation: Water》

Smaragdi chanted off that spell so smoothly it was like he was singing, filling the inside of his pitcher with water called forth via

magic. He then grabbed a handful of dried herbs from a container on a shelf and tossed them inside.

The water that he then poured into a cup gave off a slightly sweet scent.

“The aroma of this flower is said to be effective at helping one calm down. Go ahead and drink a little.”

“Thank you.”

Smaragdi sat down before Mov and watched over her as she gulped down the water. When he saw her expression had calmed a little, he asked in an intentionally relaxed tone, “So, just what happened?”

“...Lady Epilogi, she handed down a prophecy...”

“Lady Epilogi did?”

Smaragdi was also very familiar with that name.

Even since back when the previous king was alive, the one in charge of managing the temple was a woman with high-ranking divine protection from Banafsaj, who was called the grand priestess. That woman’s name was Epilogi.

The power of those with the divine protection of Banafsaj was that of prophecy, but the things that an individual could divine varied from person to person. There were those who could predict weather and natural disasters in advance, and those who could sense danger ahead of time. Their degree of precision also varied based on the strength of their divine protection.

Those various phenomena had their own complexity about them, and amongst them, the ability to read people’s futures in particular only ever appeared in priests and priestesses with the highest-ranking of divine protection. That also manifested differently from person to person.

Mov, who was called the “Purple Lady Oracle,” was able to see through countless possibilities.

Immediately after being exposed to the terror of the Second Demon Lord, all of the possibilities she could see with her power were overwritten with death. Death came equally for all living things, so the possibility of death followed everyone. There was no helping that Mov ended up with such deep scars on her heart, after being tossed about by her own ability and being surrounded by nothing but gloomy and ghastly futures.

Epilogi also saw people’s futures, but her power was to voice a future that was fated to be, more a proclamation than a prediction. At times it was only fragments, but that power was never wrong and guided a great many people and the very nation itself.

“Was Lady Epilogi’s prediction something bad?” Smaragdi guessed, his voice maintaining a kind tone. Mov looked down like she

found it hard to say, but then peeked up at Smaragdi's face and in a slightly sweet tone reminiscent of her younger self said, "It... wasn't something bad. In fact, for the nation, it is an auspicious event."

"I don't belong to the temple. So you don't need to give me their answer, and can tell me how you really feel."

Mov's expression relaxed just a bit when she heard those words. The typical tension in the air around her thinned. Mov always had to keep striving to act in a manner befitting of a high-ranking priestess, so as someone who would listen to her own thoughts and feelings, Smaragdi was incredibly precious to her.

Mov was also aware that she had come to depend on that kind man, and that he had distanced himself as a result.

Even so, she wasn't able to suppress how she felt.

A great many people called her the Lady Oracle who would guide their futures, and listen to her words. However, not even a single one among them tried to listen to *her* words.

She understood that. And in the past, she hadn't even questioned it. But through the time she spent together with Smaragdi, she came to understand just how lonely that was.

She had wanted to always be pampered, like a normal child. There was only one person who would do that for her, who would indulge her and tell her it was alright to cry. It was because Smaragdi was that sort of person that Mov had run to him.

As someone able to read countless futures, slipping out of the shrine wasn't an impossible task for Mov.

"I'll... give birth to a 'king.'"

Smaragdi's green eyes opened wide with surprise in response to Mov's words.

"My child will become king... that was Lady Epilogi's prophecy."

In Vassilios, the word "king" referred to the nation's ruler, the First Demon Lord. Ever since the previous one had been killed by the Second Demon Lord, that throne had been left empty, and it went without saying that a great many people wanted to see it filled.

In that way, it was certainly an "auspicious" prophecy. In fact, it could be called a promise of the birth of a new king.

"However..." Mov looked down once more with a pained expression on her face, and forced out in a tiny voice that was hard to pick up, "Ever since then, every day... men claiming to be candidates for the king's father have been appearing before me."

"I see..."

Understanding the situation now, Smaragdi's expression darkened as well.

The devils who lived in Vassilios had a matriarchal society, and children were raised by their mothers. However, it wasn't as if fathers

had nothing whatsoever to do with their children. The bangles that everyone wore were given from fathers to their children. That helped children understand who their father was, and also acted as a form of identification for devils. The child and father's names were engraved in the bangle, and a promise that the father would protect their child for their entire lifetime.

And so, thanks to the prophecy, ambitious men started to appear, claiming they were worthy to become the father of the coming king. Priests who wished to gain more authority in the temple, and those who wished to become involved in the government and shape the country according to their interests, claiming they were acting in the interest of their child... The form of their ambitions may have varied, but it was clear that they were all men confident they could use this child who would become king in order to elevate their own standing.

However, that was placing a great burden on Mov, leaving her almost terrified.

"If it is my destiny to lay with someone and conceive a child... then until I accept..."

"Mov, that's..."

She had lived quietly in the depths of the shrine, only interacting with a very limited number of people, only to now suddenly be exposed to a great number of men and their overflowing ambitions. It was no surprise that the young girl would end up terrified. Smaragdi's expression grew more clouded as he thought about that.

"But, I... Even so, I..."

As the tears continued to flow forth, Mov looked at Smaragdi with her golden eyes. Above her purple hair were transparent gems that closely resembled her tears. Normally, the gems used as horn decorations by high-ranking priests were purple in color, but her hair was a more beautiful color than such precious stones, so it wasn't necessary to use such colors.

"They do not even call me by my name, so why... why must I sleep with them...?!"

"It's alright, Mov. It's only natural to feel that way." He said those kind words she had wanted to hear as he stroked her purple hair with the palm of his gentle hand.

In that way, Smaragdi listened to her selfishness that would normally never be allowed without negating anything she said. Feeling happy and just a little guilty, Mov sobbed out loudly, which she hadn't even been able to do when she was a child.

"Can I... stay here for today...?"

"...I suppose there's no helping it. It's a rare request from you, after all."

Rather than forcing her to stop, he had instead affirmed that she

should let her emotions out as much as she needed to. And when she let slip that request afterwards, Smaragdi broke out in a strained smile, looking slightly troubled, but he didn't deny her request. After all, he didn't feel like he could force her to leave after hearing what he had just been told.

He let her have the bed and sat down in a chair, then lost himself in thought.

Mov looked to have worn herself out from crying and nodded off, seemingly having no issue falling asleep in front of Smaragdi. From that unguarded nature not fitting to her age, he once again saw the fact that she was a sheltered child who grew up only knowing the depths of the temple, being unaware of the outside world.

It's no surprise that Mov would feel like running away... While thinking that to himself, he stroked the head of that girl, who was sleeping with an innocent look like that of a child on her face. Perhaps unconsciously, a slight smile appeared on her face.

However... that's the natural way of things there...

While sighing, he reached out and adjusted the level of light. He would hate for it to interrupt Mov's peaceful slumber.

In the temple, nobody calls Mov by her name. That may be only natural... but for even the people trying to court her to do so...

As someone respected for her rare level of divine protection, Mov was solely treated as the "Lady Oracle" in that place. Without any ill will, and not even noticing because they were acting out of respect, they were treating her personality as an individual as secondary.

For her to have a child with someone like that...

They may say that it's her role to do so... but there's no helping how she feels, not wanting to accept that.

It wasn't all that rare for a child to be born in that manner out of political necessity.

Even so, Smaragdi wanted to grant whatever few requests came from this girl, who had put up with so much for the sake of her duty since she was but a child.

It's true that Mov is the "Lady Oracle" and the only one who can act as the successor to the grand priestess. But even so, that's no reason she shouldn't be able to voice her own desires.

"Even you... should be able to wish for your own happiness," Smaragdi whispered, a clear fondness behind his voice. However, that was most certainly not rooted romantic feelings that were burning with passion. Even so, because he had that thought, the next morning when Mov awakened, he asked her, "Mov, am I right to think... that you ran away here to my place because... if it's with me, you wouldn't mind having a child?"

With those words, Mov's cheeks flushed red and she looked

happy. Mov didn't generally show much emotion, but Smaragdi could clearly see her feelings on her face, lit up by the morning sun.

However, Mov tightly grasped his sleeve, and shook her head back and forth. She responded in the negative, looking as if she had cut herself free from her feelings, her expression and actions not matching at all.

Looking straight at the girl, Smaragdi gently stroked her still shaking head while wearing a faintly strained smile on his face.

"That's because it will lead towards a bad future for me, right?"

With those words, Mov looked up, wearing a shocked expression. She had neither confirmed nor denied, but looking at her face now was more than enough to provide Smaragdi with his answer.

"You once told me that if I got involved with you, it meant I would die... If you and I have a child, will that lead me closer to death?"

Just like how he had worn a gentle smile on the day they first met and she predicted his death, there was still no despair or hopelessness to be found in Smaragdi's expression.

And so, Mov decided to be upfront with him, telling him of the possibility that she saw.

If she stayed silent, Smaragdi would grant her wish. If she didn't inform him of this future, then that would increase the odds of things turning out as she wished. She knew that. But she didn't want to use that knowledge to try to deceive Smaragdi.

Those feelings of Mov's showed in her trembling voice.

"If we have a child together... then you will die for that child's sake. You will sacrifice your own life to protect them... But if that child is not born... you'll be able to live a proper peaceful, full life..."

"So that's the future you saw?"

On that day when they first met, Mov hadn't been able to see the possible futures that clearly. But after receiving this declaration from Epilogi and observing the possibilities that lay beyond her choices, she finally understood.

It was her wish that drew Smaragdi towards a future in which he died... towards a possibility in which this kind person would be lost.

And so, understanding that such an action meant the possibility of her wish not being granted, she left it to him to decide.

"It's alright, Mov. At least to me, that isn't an unfortunate prophecy."

She had bet on that possibility, in which she would hear those words she had wanted to, accompanied by his kind smile.

"I'll be able to have a child, which wouldn't be guaranteed no matter how hard I wished for it otherwise. That's a happy prediction, I'd say."

Having her wish accepted with those kind words, she was overjoyed. As the tears flowed freely from Mov's eyes, Smaragdi gently placed his arms around her.



Epilogi was quite old, but it was still several years more before the position of the highest-ranking in the temple was passed to Mov. When that time came, Smaragdi began openly visiting Mov in her room in the depths of the temple.

Devils didn't have a custom of getting married the way that humans did, so the norm was for a man to visit a woman for the sole purpose of having a child together. It wasn't as if a woman would never visit a man, but as a matriarchal society, it was far more common for the man to visit the woman.

During the process, Mov's perception of Smaragdi was revised a bit. Normally, there were guards placed along the corridor between the portion of the temple visitors could enter and the inner sanctum. However, Smaragdi was permitted to freely pass by them without needing to ask permission each time. That directive had come from Mov, but there were still those who weren't particularly fond of him, so they plotted to harass him in several ways on the way to her room.

Mov was enraged when she learned of that. She felt guilty for having Smaragdi face such unpleasantness because of her, and her pride had been harmed by the way that they made light of her words as the grand priestess. However, she didn't need to lend Smaragdi a hand.

On that day, the one to appear before Smaragdi was a muscle-bound man. Both he and the others in priest clothing accompanying him had elaborate silverwork hanging from their horns. Looking at the number of purple jewels used in them alongside that, it seemed he was quite a high-ranking priest.

The look in Smaragdi's green eyes grew a number of degrees colder when he finished taking measure of the man. Mov only knew his gaze as gentle and warm like spring sprouts, so she would surely be surprised to see how cold it was now.

"This isn't the sort of place someone who is not even a priest should be coming and going as he pleases," the man said with a sneer, clearly trying to provoke Smaragdi. His followers followed suit and laughed as well.

With his cold gaze fixed on them, Smaragdi smiled back. Having sensed his disdain behind that, a rage akin to bloodlust could be sensed coming off the men who had judged Smaragdi as their inferior. Seeing them let their emotions show so clearly on their faces, Smaragdi's evaluation of the men dropped another level.

Such simple-minded men could never help support Mov, who faced the heavy responsibility of managing the government. It was presumptuous for any of them to even dare to offer their names as candidates to become her partner.

“A scrawny man like you, with such pathetic mana, would never be able to sire a child fitting to become king.”

On top of the matter of their intelligence, they also seemed to be utterly lacking in character. Smaragdi finished grading them in his mind, and gave them a failing mark.

Even though he was facing opponents who far outstripped him physically, Smaragdi showed no sign of being afraid.

“Ah, I was wondering who it was. I see, it’s Geranós’s child Zíleia and Nýchi’s son Pséftis. And you there, you’re Phérma’s boy, aren’t you? Your mother must be turning in her grave, to have raised such a mannerless brute with muscles in place of character.”

One of the followers, Pséftis, visibly bristled after hearing those words. That raised his marks just a bit, but it was already too late, as he had received his failing mark. Before he could warn of how unusual it was for someone they should have been meeting for the first time to know not only their names but their lineage, Zíleia’s ignorance cut in.

“You dare to speak that way to me, knowing who I am?”

“Oh, I know. After all, your magic teacher was Pharos and your martial arts instructor was Sevasmós, both pupils of mine,” Smaragdi informed him without any hesitation. Understanding the meaning behind those words, the color at last drained from Zíleia’s face.

“It’s true that my amount of mana isn’t all that great. However, Sevasmós should have taught you that it was dangerous to make light of an opponent based on that. I suppose I may have to re-educate that child from scratch, too,” said Smaragdi with a smile, but his eyes were completely serious.

Training from Smaragdi’s favored pupils, Pharos and Sevasmós, certainly wouldn’t have been anything easy. Perhaps remembering that, Zíleia grew more and more pale.

“If I recall correctly, you boasted a level of mana that far exceeded the average for a devil. And Sevasmós also recognized your physical strength as being beyond that of the common man.”

Zíleia opened his mouth to pounce on the man’s words and say how he would show him that superiority firsthand, but he was unable to speak. Before he managed to get a word out, Smaragdi continued on in a cold voice, “But at the same time, your mana control is less than even that of a child, and you’re a fool who boasts of his reckless courage born from his strength. There was no point in the two of them teaching this much of a fool, I’d say. And to think that rather than

devoting yourself to your studies after learning under them, instead you've grown arrogant... They truly have my sympathy, those children."

Zíleia's pale face was flushed pure red. He gave into his rage and stopped even thinking. The fist he raised was a powerful enough weapon that it could have easily shattered the bones of Smaragdi's slender body, and could have even taken the man's life. Even so, Smaragdi maintained his composure.

"《Magical Wall》"

He had solely used the name, which didn't fulfill the proper form for a chant used to cast magic. Normally such a thing wouldn't even activate, but thanks to Smaragdi's high-level control technique, it manifested for just an instant.

It was only a mere instant. But that was more than enough time to divert his opponent's fist away from himself ever so slightly. In that way, he dodged the blow. At the same time, he smoothly recited a proper chant.

"Oh light, appear before me and become my shield. 《Magical Wall》"

It was a simply composed bit of magic, creating what should have been a makeshift wall of light that would shatter before such herculean strength. However, it stopped Zíleia's fist with a dull sound, not even shaking the tiniest bit in the process.

A cold sweat ran down Zíleia's back. No matter how foolish he may have been, he at least had enough brain cells to comprehend what had happened.

The wall that Smaragdi had created had been just enough to stop a single fist. He had displayed his ability to achieve the greatest possible effect with the smallest possible activation. As a race that was so intimately familiar with magic, any devil would realize just how difficult of a task that was.

And that wasn't all. Despite that being the smallest possible of shields, it had sealed his movements. That meant he had read Zíleia's moves completely. It was something that couldn't possibly be carried out without a keen eye for observation and great control technique.

"It seems you've earned failing marks in terms of martial arts ability, too. Such an utterly simple attack didn't even require any prediction to figure out."

Smaragdi didn't have any skill in the martial arts himself. At least for a member of the hardy devil race, he was weak enough that it could be said that he had a delicate constitution. However, he was always aware of his own weakness.

"Even if one is born with great power, if they cannot use it, then it holds even less meaning than the strength of those born lacking such

things,” Smaragdi criticized in a cold tone. He had decided to crush the confidence of this man who believed he held a position of absolute superiority by showing him overwhelming power. Surely, such a clever little trick wouldn’t be sufficient for such a purpose. Smaragdi’s smile had a chill to it that called to mind an executioner.

It was then that the men at last realized that this slender fellow before them was not the weakling he appeared to be at first glance. However, it was already too late.

Smaragdi was always gentle and kind in front of Mov, and that held true for how he acted in front of most people as well. He was certainly a very patient man, and caring as well. That could also be seen in the way that he wasn’t bothered by teaching children, generously accepting even the unreasonable outbursts of emotion characteristic of them.

However, that wasn’t all that there was to him.

As one who made his living providing children with guidance, he hadn’t ever neglected to sharpen his fangs for the sake of protecting his pupils. And he was also a man who believed it was an elder’s duty to protect the young, and was prepared to take the full brunt of whatever he needed to in order to do so.

As he judged these men to be enemies of both himself and Mov, he didn’t hesitate to launch a counterattack, lacking even a hint of mercy.

By the time Mov learned that because she had chosen Smaragdi, he faced all sorts of attacks, starting with slander and harassment, from the other “candidates,” they had altogether lost their will to fight.

Those who found fault with the low level of mana he was born with...

Those who were prideful due to their lineage...

Those who boasted of their sturdy physique...

The arrogant self-conceit of those men varied in form, but Smaragdi neither flattered any of them nor kept his head down around them.

As someone who knew he was born lacking any great gifts, through sheer effort he had clawed his way to a place where he could stand alongside those with talent, making Smaragdi no ordinary man.

Furthermore, those pupils who studied under him all reached a rather high level when it came to their magic studies. However, that wasn’t just limited to that field of studies. No matter what position they may find themselves in, any devil would assuredly have a chance to study magic. When including his fellow instructors, his connections both inside the temple and out granted him a great deal of influence.

When Smaragdi was truly angered, he became a rather dangerous

individual.

A number of those self-proclaimed “candidates” were ruined socially, and some were forced to return to their family homes. There were even those who were stricken with a fear of people, no longer able to even leave their rooms.

With some thorough “aftercare,” Smaragdi completely wiped out the possibility of others saying things like “Such a feeble man dares call himself the father of a king...?” The personality of that methodical, serious man showed in his actions.

By the way, those calling themselves “candidates” who were actually fittingly clever enough to accurately read the situation knew from the start that it would be foolish to stand against Smaragdi. Before considering anything like becoming father of a king, it was absolutely essential for anyone who wished to serve in a position of influence in the temple to have a friendly relationship with the Lady Oracle, Mov. As such, acting antagonistic towards her lover who she trusted so deeply would only serve to act greatly against their own interests.

Around that time when Smaragdi was being recognized as such a presence in the temple despite not even being a priest, Mov became pregnant. At full term, she gave birth to twin girls.

The prophecy was that Mov’s child would become king, and there was only one open throne amongst the demon lords, but two children were born. That fact rocked the people of the temple greatly.

After much thought on the matter, the simple conclusion reached was that one of these two girls would become the ruler of the nation.

It was decided that Mov’s children, who had become candidates for the throne, were to be raised in strict secrecy in the depths of the temple. Based on the painful memories of the Second Demon Lord once slaying the former candidate for that position, it was necessary to use even more caution, hiding their very existence as they were being raised. That was because if they were found out, it was likely they would become targets in the same manner as the last king.

Even knowledge of Mov’s pregnancy was kept known to the bare minimum of those serving by her side. While it was an auspicious event for the nation, the fact that she had given birth to twin girls was a fact known only to a portion of the elites of the temple. Those debating the situation also had a shortage of information on which to judge the situation. As a result, all they could do was wait until information presented itself, which made it difficult for those top-ranking officials with their closed-minded ways of thinking to immediately hand down a decision.

Smaragdi, meanwhile, was in a separate, quiet room and was utterly detached from that commotion, seemingly having no interest

whatsoever in the thinking of those concerning themselves with a power struggle. But what he showed on the surface and what he was thinking inside were different matters, as he had laid the groundwork to immediately make a move if the decision made by those elderly troublemakers threatened to cause trouble for Mov and his daughters.

However, he didn't let the recuperating Mov see that in the least. In her postpartum confinement, Mov lay listlessly atop the bed, looking utterly exhausted. Smaragdi gently smiled, wiping the sweat from her brow.

"I don't care which one of them becomes king. I just want them to grow up healthy," he said in a kind voice that relieved the one listening to him, telling Mov his true feelings. Hearing that, Mov smiled, then brought her cheek up against Smaragdi's palm, which had just finished wiping her sweat.

"I hadn't ever considered... that there would be two of them..."

"Even though you're called the all-seeing Lady Oracle, there are still things you don't know... You did good."

"Yeah... It was tough."

"Thank you, Mov. I never imagined I'd be able to have two adorable daughters like this."

Hearing these frank words of appreciation, Mov broke out in a smile.

When she had thought on the task of child raising, which she was unaccustomed to, she hadn't even imagined that she would suddenly be doing it for two. But when she saw her daughters sleeping peacefully side by side, she didn't feel the need to worry about such concerns.

"Their hair is the same color as mine, isn't it...? And their horns are still small, but they have your shape, Mov."

"I'd heard that horns were soft right after being born, but... it really was surprising, seeing it for real."

"Yeah, it's enough to make you feel afraid to touch them too firmly... Looks like they inherited their horn color from me, too... It really is a strange feeling, looking at them. I really am a father now, aren't I...?"

After checking that his daughters' small fingers all had tiny little fingernails, he broke out in a wide, bashful grin.

The lips of one of the girls started to twitch. When the other did the same a moment later, Smaragdi wasn't able to hold back a broad smile from erupting forth. He hadn't been able to say he felt a powerful, deep passion for Mov when they first got together, but now that she had given him these two daughters, he felt very differently. He felt even more affection for the girls than he had expected before their birth, and his feelings towards their mother, who had safely

carried out such a great task of bringing them into this world, couldn't be expressed as mere gratitude.

"Thank you, Mov."

The new mother happily squinted her eyes as Smaragdi said those kind words and lovingly caressed her head, a right that was hers and hers alone for the moment.

When the twins had just been born, they looked so identical that you couldn't tell them apart, but when they soon opened their eyes, their parents learned that their eyes were different colors.

"Golden eyes... So should I consider this the same sort of mana trait that you have, rather than genetics...?"

"Probably... I had heard it wasn't impossible for a parent and child to end up with the same mana trait, but still..."

"This girl has gray eyes. There are a lot of green eyes in my family... Maybe it's the natural color for your bloodline?"

He tapped his daughter's cute, chubby little hand with the tip of his finger, and she grabbed onto it. Finding that adorable, he broke out in a smile and kept on doing so. For some reason finding that unamusing, Mov came over and sat down by Smaragdi's side, still cradling their golden-eyed daughter in her arms.

"What should we name them?"

"The temple won't have something to say about that?"

"I won't let anyone complain about their father naming them."

"You've gotten a lot stronger than you used to be, haven't you, Mov?" Smaragdi said with a laugh, then gazed off into the distance while feeling the warmth of his daughter.

"Chrysos and Asími... No, rather than Asími, Platina... maybe?" Smaragdi soon muttered, offering those two words.

"Chrysos and Platina... What do you think?"

"I'm fine with whatever you decide, Smaragdi."

"I wanted to hear your opinion, though..." Smaragdi replied with an awkward smile to Mov's assertion, then reached out to the girl that Mov was holding. He ever so gently stroked that platinum hair, which was the same color as his but far more soft.

"Chrysos."

Then he pointed his gaze to his other daughter, who was still playing with the tip of his finger.

"Platina."

They were his precious, utterly irreplaceable daughters.

"I may be an unreliable father, but... let's take care of each other, alright?"

He smiled, wondering all the while if he'd be able to leave anything behind for these girls before his promised end arrived. But more than that, he realized it hadn't taken long at all for him to come

to think that he wouldn't mind risking his life if it was for their sake.

Smaragdi came to live with Mov and their daughters together in the depths of the great temple. In devil society, it was the mother's family's role to raise children. However, Mov had been entrusted to the temple when she was very young and separated from the world at large, so she had no such family to rely on. And neither Smaragdi nor Mov approved of the idea of entrusting a chamberlain to raise their daughters.

However, at the same time, that child-rearing had turned out to be more involved than expected, making it too much for Mov alone.

Mov had a slender figure by nature, but in order to carry out her duty as a mother, she bulked herself up. Therefore, there was no lack of milk when breastfeeding, but it still took twice as long and twice as much because she had two children instead of just one. Day by day, Mov was filled with concern that they would suck her dry.

In order to support her, Smaragdi ended up changing his place of residence. A big reason behind that was because he decided that if his time was limited, he wanted to spend at least a little more time together with his daughters. There was no helping that he ended up thinking that way, though, as his daughters were just too cute. He was already walking the path towards becoming a full on doting idiot.

The first one to learn to hold her head up properly and sit up straight was Chrysos. Platina learned to do so too just a little later, but she then tumbled over. That fall was properly cushioned so it shouldn't have hurt, but perhaps out of surprise, she blinked her big gray eyes and then started bawling loudly. Chrysos then got caught up in the flow of things and cried as well, only to lose her balance and fall over, then flip over on her back.

"That's a healthy crying voice. They're both doing well, wouldn't you say?"

While watching Mov silently panic as her gaze darted all over when faced with their daughters who wouldn't stop crying, Smaragdi casually scooped up Chrysos in his arms. In an accustomed motion he patted her back, and while Chrysos's eyes remained teary, she regained a bit of her composure. Smaragdi handed her to Mov, and then picked up Platina.

"Why are you able to get them to stop crying so easily, Smaragdi...?" Mov said with a frown while thinking on the matter.

"Who knows?" Smaragdi replied, shifting his gaze from Mov to Platina, who had stopped crying.

"Agoo."

It seemed that the point of Platina's interest as she reached out her tiny hand and clenched it again and again was Smaragdi's horn. He happily looked back at his daughter. No matter how much he

looked at them, he never tired of doing so. They were never making exactly the same expression, even for an instant. Even in the instant of seeing them blink, he spied the wonder of seeing them grow.

Smaragdi had lived for a long time, but this was his first experience raising his own children. As someone who was naturally curious and inquisitive, he found this life with his daughters, in which each and every day was overflowing with new experiences, incredibly satisfying.

“Agoo.”

“Are you all calmed down now, Latina?”

“Aa, aa.”

“You want to come to me too, Ryso?”

Chrysos was reaching out from Mov’s arms towards Smaragdi. Seeing that caused him to break out in a smile, and he picked her up too. Both of his arms were occupied with one of his daughters, but that didn’t seem to worry him at all.

Devils called young children by nicknames, and had them do the same. This custom originated from the fact that many names in the language ended up being rather long words. Their parents called Chrysos Ryso and Platina Latina, which they found adorable.

The two twins looked at one another from within Smaragdi’s arms and started making pleased sounds. Their moods had completely recovered, it seemed.

After taking that adorable sight in, he looked over at Mov, who had a bit of a bored look on her face.

“...I’ll handle these two, so you can head back to work, Mov.”

Seeing Mov make a slightly lonely looking expression, Smaragdi couldn’t help but get a bit of a sense of superiority. He was well aware that this new mother was feeling lonely now that her daughters were monopolizing the man who usually doted on her.

“Latina and Ryso are both telling you to do your best at work, Mov... Hey, I’ll be here waiting for your work to be over, too.”

It was different from what he felt for his daughters, but he also felt a deep affection for Mov, who he had watched over since she was a child. While looking at her with a loving gaze, he took his daughters’ small hands in his own and had them give a little wave.

Those two girls were deeply, deeply loved.

“Moh?”

“Oh? Moh?”

“Mov, Latina and Ryso called your name, didn’t they? Hey, what about my name?”

“Gah?”

“Ga?”

“...”

Both of the twins remembered their mother's name, Mov, first, rather than Rag.

This was the first time that Smaragdi had received such a shock in all his life.

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Even when they were babies, he couldn't help but find them incredibly adorable. They had spent the majority of the day napping and couldn't speak, instead expressing their emotions by crying. Their moods shifted freely, and they could be heard crying at any time around the clock.

He couldn't help but cherish even such rough days as that.

To Mov, who was utterly worn out by raising children for the first time ever, Smaragdi's ability to adapt was utterly incomprehensible.

However, that had only been the very start of their work.

"Rag."

"Rag, tew us a stowy!"

"A stowy!"

The adorableness of his daughters pitter-pattering over and talking to him in that awkward, childish manner was no joke.

"A story, is it?"

"A stowy!"

"Stowy!"

The girls, Platina and Chrysos, standing side-by-side and talking to him, were always holding hands. With identical motions, they looked up at their father, Smaragdi.

While thinking that these young girls may not have fully understood yet that they were separate beings, Smaragdi squinted his eyes at the adorableness of his daughters.

Just one of them would be plenty cute, but there were two. On top of that, they made the same movements as if in perfect alignment. It would be impossible not to find it precious.

Smaragdi himself had no idea that he was such a doting idiot. That was because he found the fact that his daughters were adorable to be an absolute truth.

"Then how about for today, we go with the story of a hero from a far off land?"

"Yeah!"

"Rag, hug!"

Platina was hopping up and down with both hands on the knees of her father, who was sitting in a chair with a smile on his face. It would seem that she wanted to get up atop his knees, but couldn't manage so herself. Apparently his gray-eyed daughter demanding to be picked up was quite a pampered child, just like her mother.

“Ryso too, Ryso too!” the gold-eyed girl called out while hitting the back of the chair Smaragdi was seated in, having seen what her sister was doing.

“Don’t get all flustered, Ryso. You’re right, I know it wouldn’t be fair to just pick up Latina,” Smaragdi said with a strained laugh, then picked up the girls and seated them atop his knees, as per their requests.

“When you two get a little bigger, it may become tricky to pick both of you up at the same time.”

“No!”

“Together!”

“I see. Then I guess I’ll just need to try my hardest, huh?”

Smaragdi responded to his daughter’s protests, giving a nod while wearing a serious look on his face. As if mimicking him, they let out a sound of agreement and nodded back. While holding back the urge to break out in laughter, Smaragdi dredged up the story he intended to tell from his memory. That fable he told, which was simplified to be easier for children to understand, was actually a part of history.

His daughters listened to his story with wide grins on their faces, not thinking too deeply on it. Simply listening to Smaragdi’s gentle voice made them happy. That kind voice of his echoed throughout the dreary temple room, filling it with a warm, peaceful atmosphere. Perhaps in response to that pleasant air, the two girls occasionally looked over at each other and shared identical, overjoyed smiles.



“Guru,” said an outsiders voice, intruding on this space shared by the father and his daughters. Apparently the voice’s owner, Smaragdi’s pupil, had been watching and waiting for an appropriate point in the story to interrupt.

“Ah, it’s been a while, Aspida.”

He was amongst the few priests serving the temple who were aware of the presence of Smaragdi and the twins. Aspida looked at his former teacher and the two girls he was holding.

“It seems you’ve grown fully accustomed to raising children...”

Aspida said with a strained smile, even though he had always thought of Smaragdi as someone who could handle anything smoothly. Hardly any devil men were ever involved with raising their children.

“I never imagined my own kids could be this cute, y’know?”

“Y’know?” Chrysos said, mimicking the end of her father’s sentence, causing Platina to give a cheerful laugh. Seeing his two daughters behave like a pair of frolicking kittens, Smaragdi looked incredibly pleased, and placed the girls down on the floor.

“Rag?”

“Huh?”

“I’ve gotta have a bit of a difficult conversation. You two go play for a bit, alright?”

Platina had tilted her head in confusion, but Chrysos took her hand and the two walked away, and they soon forgot about the matter.

They were being raised in secret in the depths of the temple, but it wasn’t as if they were living crammed into a single room. This great temple of Banafsaj was vast enough of a structure as to give the impression of a small town. Its various sections were segmented, and as one approached the center, security grew strict. It was an area deep within that place where Smaragdi, Mov, and the girls lived.

They weren’t able to freely go outside, but the young girls were able to live happily and healthily without feeling completely restricted. One place they especially liked to play was the inner garden, where they could spend time beneath the open sunlight. The girls pitter-pattered along in that direction, hand in hand.

Seeing them, Aspida muttered, “They really do resemble the Lady Oracle...”

Their mother, Mov, had a pretty face ever since childhood, but after maturing, she had developed a composed manner about her that only added to her beauty. The otherworldly feel about her that made her feel separate from the world of the temple only strengthened the mysterious impression she gave off.

If you were to ask Smaragdi he would say that it was because she

was something of an airhead who knew nothing of the outside world, but he wouldn't deny that Mov was beautiful.

The twins had identical faces, and they both inherited their mother's looks. Their father, Smaragdi, had a rather ordinary face. But apparently, the twins had inherited his genes as well in the best possible manner. Compared to Mov's beauty, which made it hard for others to approach her, their two daughters had a cuteness to them that charmed friendly strangers.

Even without Smaragdi's perspective as a doting idiot, they really were adorable children.

"No matter how cute they may be, I won't ever forgive you if you sleep with them."

"They're still way too young to be saying such things, no matter how adorable they may be."

Aspida's rebuttal was absolutely the proper reaction. But even so, after responding, he sensed a cold air of intimidation hiding behind Smaragdi's smile. He trembled a bit as he felt a chill run down his spine. As someone who didn't have children, he couldn't understand the bloodlust coming off this father, as if to say he wouldn't let anyone take his daughters away even after they were all grown up.

"Did something happen?" Smaragdi prompted in his normal, calm manner.

"Well, the truth is..." Aspida started, composing himself, and informed Smaragdi of the latest state of affairs in the temple, which was the purpose behind his visit.

Even though Mov was the top-ranking priestess, she was still young. As if looking down on her for that reason, those troublesome elders who had become nothing but narrow-minded in their old age dealt with her by making sure the workload was heavy for Aspida and the other young priests who assisted her. As someone with tight lips who was far from a stranger to Mov, those young folks had come to rely on Smaragdi as someone to confide in.

Just like how he had once dealt with those men who tried to lay a hand on Mov, Smaragdi was steadily helping to solidify Mov's position. When he saw a twisted smile cross Smaragdi's face as he thought that those annoyances who had done nothing but live a long time couldn't be "wiped out" as easily, Aspida did his best to pretend he saw nothing.

The way that Smaragdi could still act so mercilessly despite having racked up years of experience himself earned him even further respect from his students.

"Rag!"

"Hmm? What is it?" Smaragdi asked, turning to face his daughters and cutting off his conversation with his pupil. Chrysos and Platina

came running up to him hand in hand with a pitter-patter, each holding a small flower in their other hand. With a satisfied grin, Platina offered hers to Smaragdi.

“Flowers!”

“Fow you.”

“You’re giving it to me? Thank you. It’s beautiful.”

Seeing Smaragdi kneel and accept it, the twins looked at each other and smiled.

“What about Chrysos’s flower?”

“Mov’s!”

“Fow her.”

“I see. I’m sure that’ll make Mov happy, too. Should we put them in water, so they don’t dry up?”

“Yeah.”

“Water!”

Seeing the twins look even happier with this praise from their beloved father, Smaragdi’s expression grew even more blissful, too.

“Oh water, mother who nurtures all life...”

Smaragdi’s daughters watched attentively as their father smoothly chanted the lengthy spell. Normally, as a chant grew longer, the resulting magic grew more powerful in turn. Furthermore, it would also take a great toll in terms of mana and become more difficult to control.

The level of mana Smaragdi was born with wasn’t all that great. It wouldn’t be strange at all for him to run out of mana and faint if he cast powerful magic. However, he was able to carry it out by concentrating his mana to the tip of his finger and limiting it to the smallest area of effect possible. That was an incredibly difficult exercise in magic control, but he made it look deceptively simple.

“《Healing Water》”

The shallow dish was filled with water called forth from this magic. Smaragdi gently placed the small flower he had received from his daughter within it. That flower, which had started to wilt after being grasped tightly in her small hand, regained its liveliness. Chrysos then mimicked her father and placed the flower she had been holding into the water too, only for Smaragdi to stroke her head in order to tell her she had done a good job.

Only Aspida gave a sigh at the sight of his teacher’s highly skilled use of magic. Normally, after it manifested the healing effect of the magic in the water would fade away, but he had maintained it by overwriting part of the spell, something no ordinary magic user could manage.

His tiny daughters watched the magic their father carried out with sparkling eyes filled with curiosity, but they didn’t seem to have even

an inkling that society at large would consider such a deed to be impossible. And their mother, the Lady Oracle, was a talented woman who had born with a great deal of mana and received training under Smaragdi. They were completely out of touch with the norms of the world.

By the by, the story his teacher had been telling his daughters was a “fable” of a real event that had occurred in the past. Though it sounded like the sort of allegory aimed towards children, it covered both the era of a wise king, as well as the chaotic age of a feeble-minded ruler. In terms of content alone, it didn’t differ all that much from the sort of subjects Aspida and those other members of the temple involved with governing examined in study groups.

The children of the guru and the Lady Oracle... Just what sort of upbringing will they have, before one of them becomes king...?

Seeing the twins beg their father to pick them up again, only for his teacher to break out in a wide, sloppy grin, Aspida gave another sigh.

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When they thought on how their daughters had to live in such a confined world, Smaragdi and Mov felt truly blessed that they were born as twins. As they didn’t know anything of the outside world, neither Chrysos nor Platina understood that the circumstances they were growing up under were unique. They didn’t seem to think of themselves as unfortunate, either.

What brought their parents the greatest relief was that they had someone to grow alongside and share all kinds of things and experiences with. Relative to other races, devils had very few children. And when it came to a child raised in secret in such a confined space, that meant there was no guarantee there would be any other children they could play with.

The presence of one another clearly had a great, positive influence on these girls, who possessed great sensitivity and were very expressive.

To start with, twins were very rare for devils. They would live for a long time, and neither their parents nor themselves wished to categorize them as the “younger” or “older” sister based solely on who was born just a tiny bit sooner.

For the two of them, they spent more time looking at one another than looking into a mirror. There was always someone who looked identical by their side. The young girls even gave off the impression that they didn’t even realize that they were separate beings, and that their upbringing had done little to disavow them of the notion.

Platina would tilt her head, and then a moment later, Chrysos,

who was sitting across from her, would do the same. Then it would happen the other way around. If Chrysos suddenly rolled, Latina would mimic her. The pair's game of copying one another headed towards a conclusion of sorts as they laughed simultaneously.

It was the sort of play where no one but the two of them would know what's so amusing. Even so, watching them, Smaragdi found them so adorable that it only stressed the point that they were the apple of his eye.

"Rag?"

While Smaragdi was busy feeling all warm and fuzzy, the twins came up to his side and looked up at him, holding hands as always.

Chrysos and Platina were both bundles of curiosity, so it was difficult to tell who would have been able to walk first when the time had come. However, Chrysos turned out to be a little cautious, while Latina had been afraid.

Whenever Smaragdi noticed a difference between the twins that they themselves were unaware of, his gentle smile softened even further.

"What is it?"

"What?"

"Whaat?"

The two sisters were tilting their heads and pointing at the documents Smaragdi had spread out for work. Smaragdi's personality could be seen through the methodical letters there.

"It may still be a little tricky for you two," Smaragdi said with an awkward laugh.

"Hm?"

"Hmm?"

The twins tilted their heads.

The letters written out on the documents were complex in form, composed all sorts of different symbols.

Devil letters were incredibly difficult to understand. Each letter had its own meaning, and that meaning could change when combined with other ones. Each letter wasn't based on a sound, and if you didn't understand the meaning of each one, then it would be impossible to understand.

The words of the devil language were the same as those used in magic chants, and the characters were said to be a graphical representation of the mana fluctuations caused by each word.

"I'll teach you when you're a little bigger, alright?"

Until one understood a certain degree of words, they wouldn't be ready for learning letters. As such, there was a tendency amongst devils to learn them when they were a bit older. But due to their long lifespans, they didn't find that anything worth fussing over.

Children this young were essentially never taught how to read. However, Smaragdi got out a blank piece of paper and wrote two “letters” on it. Those two letters included similar parts to them. Like those two adorable girls in front of him now, they were very similar letters that were still different.

“This one is “Chrysos,” and this is “Platina’... Ryso, Latina, this is how you write your names.”

Even for a country with abundant mineral resources like Vassilios, gold and platinum were considered precious metals, and thanks to the colors associated with them, they also included the meaning of “sun” and “moon” in their characters.

“Ryso?”

“Latina?”

“That’s right. They indicate your names.”

“And Mov?”

“And Rag?”

While staring intently at the characters, the girls asked about different names at the same time. It was rather heartwarming, and at the same time, he also felt relieved that they hadn’t both asked about their mother.

“My name... is like this. And this is Mov’s.”

Smaragdi’s pen slid along, writing out the characters for “Smaragdi” and “Mov.” Seeing them, the twins both made a look of dissatisfaction at the same time. He felt bad for the girls, but the sight of them puffing up their cheeks in sync a bit was just so adorable that he couldn’t help but break out in a smile.

“What’s wrong?”

“Different!”

“Dun like!”

“I see. So you don’t like how our names aren’t similar, the way that yours are, huh?”

Smaragdi wore a strained smile, having immediately figured out the nature of his daughters’ complaint. He gently stroked their hair.

“You see, the two of you share a special bond that no one else does... You look just alike, but you’re two different people. And both of you are our precious children.”

The girls were still young, and they didn’t seem to really understand what he was saying. But sensing the love in their father’s kind voice, they both gave a happy giggle.

Their beloved father hugged them both tightly at the same time, thinking this was no time to be working. However, rather than getting in his way, they simply sat there and stared as Smaragdi worked away, seemingly enjoying themselves.

Apparently even Smaragdi just smoothly writing away was

enough to fill them with curiosity. His letters being lined up so methodically that it was like it was only natural for them to be there was just as mysterious a sight to them as magic.

“Dat’s amazing.”

“So pwetty.”

The two girls shared their feelings and exchanged smiles with one another.

Sensing his daughters’ gazes on him, Smaragdi felt a bit more nervous than usual, and his pen started to move faster. They were so interested in the matter...

It was still too soon to teach them their letters, but Smaragdi thought that teaching them how to use a pen would work, so he naturally ended up trying to finish up his work for the day early.

He had his daughters sit atop his knees and had them grip the pen, supporting their hands with his own from behind. After doing so for each of them in turn, he distanced himself a bit and watched over them, not lending a hand more than was necessary. Platina was the first of the two to manage to hold it well.

“Good going, Latina.”

Platina looked proud, having heard her father’s praise. Beside her, Chrysos puffed up her cheeks a bit as she re-adjusted her grip on her pen again and again. These two were so similar to each other, but one would always naturally learn to do something first, inspiring the other to acquire the skill too.

With a gentle expression in his eyes, Smaragdi thought that it would be good if that slight desire not to lose became one of their strong points.

“You’ve got just a little more to go yourself, Ryso. Ah, just like that... Yeah, that’s the way.”

“Did it!”

“Yeah. You did a great job too, Ryso.”

There was a somehow serious air about his daughters as they scribbled freely on the paper laid out before them with a look of accomplishment on their faces. Apparently they were mimicking the sight of their father doing work in their own way.

It was a completely and utterly adorable sight, so even when they overturned the ink bottle soon after and ended up dyed in its blue-black contents, he wasn’t particularly bothered.

“Waaaaaaaah!”

“Rag, Rag!”

They cried out in panic for their father to help them, hopping down from their chairs and running over towards him. In the process, the ink bottle was knocked down to the floor, and the resulting sound caused them both to jump.

The ink from the bottle had spread on the floor in addition to the tabletop, and having stepped in it the twins had had left footprints scattered all over.

“Calm down, you two, it’s alright, so...”

Smaragdi’s words didn’t reach the two girls in their panicked state. They left handprints on their father’s clothes when they went to hug him, and when they grabbed all over due to how flustered they were, the number of little “stamps” all over only grew.

It was only natural that ink-stained hands would leave behind ink. But apparently that was not something the young girls had been able to see coming. As the number of handprints continued to grow, Smaragdi thought on how he could stop his daughters from crying.

“...And so, these are those handprints. It was just too adorable, so I was thinking I’d leave them there, as a memento.”

It was an important job of Rag’s to report on how the girls were doing after Mov finished her official duties for the day.

It was now late at night, and the sound of the pair snoozing away atop the bed sounded somehow out of tune. But even so, the timing of their breathing in their sleep and the way that they tossed and turned was the same, reminding one all the more of the fact that they were twins.

“Hmm... I should normally be the one raising them... but I have left it all up to you, Smaragdi...”

“I feel fortunate, that the task came around to me because you were so busy.”

As Mov stroked Platina’s hair, the girl’s face shifted into a happy smile, even though she remained asleep. As if that happy feeling had been transmitted over from her other half, Chrysos made the same sort of smile by her side.

While grinning at her daughters, Mov gently touched their blue-stained fingertips.

“A bit of ink coloring still remains around their fingertips.”

“I called for a lady-in-waiting and tried to get them in the bath right away, but it apparently stained a bit.”

Bathtime was the only time that Smaragdi entrusted his daughters to someone else. He felt that as their father, he needed to set a boundary there. Precisely because they were such papa’s girls, he felt it was important to teach them the need to keep a certain degree of distance from the opposite sex.

Smaragdi was boundlessly soft on his daughters, but he was properly strict when it came to the matter of their education.

“It’s important for those two to face failure like this from time to time, too.”

“Right...”

Mov's gaze towards her daughters was filled with a mother's great love. Though the time they could spend together was limited, Smaragdi had no doubt of her deep affection for their daughters.

With a gentle smile on his face, Smaragdi beckoned Mov over.

That slightly blushing face of Mov's was one unknown to those people of the temple who revered her as the Lady Oracle, fitting to a young woman such as herself. Though they had already had children, she still had an innocent inexperience to her actions.

As Smaragdi embraced her, Mov closed her eyes with a joyful look on her face.

"You've been working plenty hard. I know that, Mov."

"You truly are skilled at pampering people, Smaragdi... If these girls become spoiled, it will surely be your fault."

"There wouldn't be anything wrong with that. After all, these girls are hard workers, just like you. And I'd say we need to pamper them."

As he gently stroked her horns to comfort her just as he always did with their daughters, Mov became lost in the sensation, her expression softening.

Mov was washed away by that gentle happiness brought by their time together, causing her to forget everything that had happened up until now as she brought her cheek to Smaragdi's chest.



Their daughters continued to grow rapidly day by day.

Their days were never the same, and they were never dull. It was a blink of the eye after they were born until they were able to walk and talk, but now that a few years had passed, they clearly started exhibiting their own separate wills. It was a dramatic change that occurred in just these few years' time. Due to the nature of his job, he had a relatively high degree of interaction with children, but being able to watch over their growth everyday like this was a special feeling for him.

It wasn't as if there weren't any incidents whatsoever. There were small ones day by day, and occasionally some that weren't so little as the sisters continued to grow.

"Mov, why are you small?"

The incident that day started with a single comment from Platoma that was devoid of malice. It was her mother, Mov, who she asked that question to. Her daughter had no ill will behind that statement. The twins were highly curious, and a great many things interested them. Their father had knowledge of a great many things, and they had learned that all things had a reason, as well as the youthful joy of fulfilling their personal curiosity.

That was surely something to be glad over, but even so...

Smaragdi had emphasized that she shouldn't ever raise her hand to a child, so she didn't do so. However, it was her duty as a mother to teach her daughter that there were some things in this world that mustn't be said.

Having decided as such, Mov turned towards Platina, who was looking up at her with a gaze of pure, innocent curiosity.

Streetch.

She grabbed hold of her daughter's cheeks. Those little cheeks were squishier than she had expected, and they stretched without even putting in much power at all.

"Platina."

"Pwah!"

Being called by her full name rather than her usual nickname, Platina jumped.

"In this world, there are some things that must never be asked, thing that must never be said. Times where silence is the right choice."

"Gwah..." Latina let out that strange sound while looking up at her mother, tears streaming from both eyes.

Her cheeks stretched further, and her sobbing increased in turn.

Her daughter's question was likely grounded in the fact that she lacked the two abundant mounds the ladies-in-waiting, the other women the girl was familiar with, possessed. That was Mov's assumption.

Platina was likely just curious, lacking any ill-will. However, the matter at hand was also a complex for Mov.

Mov sought to inspire love in Smaragdi. It wasn't as though such feelings had led him to yearn for her. He simply hadn't been able to cast her aside, because he was kind.

Mov felt deeply obligated for that fact. Because Smaragdi was someone who treated her as precious, she regretted having led him towards his destruction, and she also lacked confidence in herself as a woman.

When it came to her skills at governing, she simply needed to study diligently. But when it came to gaining a full feminine silhouette, she had no idea what she should do. She'd possessed a thin figure, ever since she was a child.

Perhaps Smaragdi preferred a more womanly figure. It was because she was so in love with him that such things worried Mov.

As Platina stood paralyzed in place, a long time passed. What finally changed the situation was the action of her other half.

"Rag, Rag! Hurry, hurry!"

"Why are you so flustered, Ryso?"

Chrysos desperately pulled on Rag, tears in her eyes.

As soon as Mov started her scolding attack on Platina's cheeks, Chrysos moved to take action. In the small world she knew, the only one capable of stopping their mother was their father. In order to save her other half from that terrifying assault on her cheeks, she immediately left the scene to request aid.

Smaragdi had no idea what was going on. The teary-eyed Chrysos hadn't explained anything, only telling him that he needed to hurry. Having thus received no prior information, what Smaragdi saw was Mov stretching his other daughter's cheeks out to the side. Instinctively, he found himself impressed that Platina's cheeks could stretch that far. More importantly, he felt an overwhelming pressure coming off of Mov akin to what he felt when dealing with those sly old foxes in their monstrous den in the depths of the temple, causing him to break out in a cold sweat.

For now, all he could think was that he had no clue what was happening.

She's crying.

That was no way to handle a child. It was no surprise that their daughters were sobbing. It wasn't just Platina, who was taking Mov's anger head on. Chrysos, who had come to him for help, also had tears flowing from her eyes.

"Mov, let's drop it there. You're scaring Ryso too, not just Platina," rebuked Smaragdi in a slightly firm voice. With that, it wasn't just their daughters crying, as Mov teared up as well.

He really had no idea what was going on.

Released from Mov's hands, Platina's cheeks snapped back to their original shape. The girl placed her hands over them and looked up at Smaragdi, tears streaming from her eyes.

"Rag, does Latina still have cheeks?"

"You're alright. They didn't come off."

Apparently the girl had been so terrified as to be worried her cheeks were ripped right off. The normally lively and cheerful Platina tottered over to Smaragdi and then approached Chrysos, who was clinging to her father with teary eyes. The two joined hands, and then as if sharing the terror they had experienced, hugged one another tight. As Smaragdi got down on his knees and put his arms around the girls, he noticed a resentful gaze coming from Mov.

He soon understood: She was sulking.

Mov didn't often let her feelings show through her expressions. However, Smaragdi had gotten quite good at picking up on them.

"...Mov," Smaragdi called out to her, but she remained silent and kept on pouting. All he could do in response was give an awkward laugh.

"...Did Latina tease you?"

With those words, the harshness faded from Mov's glare. Her daughter had picked on her, yet Smaragdi was only doting on them, causing Mov to feel more than a little jealous.

While Smaragdi thought to himself that it was immature, he also knew that Mov, who was still far younger than him, was always pushing herself more than she needed to.

"Come here."

He gave each of his daughters' heads a stroke and then stood up and headed towards Mov with his arms held wide open. She half-ran towards Smaragdi and then threw herself into his chest, hugging him. She didn't say a word. Even though she was a pampered child, she was bad at letting others spoil her. Knowing that, Smaragdi simply ran his palm through her beautiful purple hair.

Before he noticed it, fitting to that special ability of children to change gears so easily, their daughters were back to their normal selves and playing around as if nothing had happened. Seeing that caused Smaragdi to breathe a sigh of relief, and then he turned back to face Mov. He took her hand and led her over to a chair, and then Mov sat down atop his knees like it was only natural to do so. Apparently she had decided to let him dote on her thoroughly.

"Just what exactly happened? What did Latina do?"

"...She said I was small." Mov replied in a whisper so quiet it was almost inaudible.

"I don't think you need to worry about that."

"It is not as if I desire to be small..."

Hazarding a guess as to what had occurred from the words she was using, Smaragdi gave a strained smile. He hadn't thought she was that concerned about her own physique.

"Even that cute way you get so self-conscious is part of what makes you who you are, I'd say," said Smaragdi without any hesitation, not so much as missing a beat.

"...You would not prefer someone more womanly...?"

"You may have been the one who wished for it to start with, but I'm the one who decided to be together with you, Mov."

The Mov clinging to him now and saying such things in a worried voice was not the "All-seeing Lady Oracle." Seeing through that fact, Smaragdi felt the need to be kind and pamper her too.

"I wouldn't have been able to have such adorable children with anyone but you, Mov."

"I feel you like Latina and Ryso better than me..."

Smaragdi found it absolutely adorable the way that Mov let him and him alone dote on her, despite being even more strict in regards to her responsibilities than anyone else.

In the end, he thought that he really may be fond of pampering

her like this as he hugged the girl who was far younger than him even more tightly. He decided that rather than his daughters, he would spend the day spoiling her instead.

“They’re the children born to the two of us, so of course they’re precious to me.”

If he hated her, then even if he had wanted them, there’s no way that he would stay with her like this even after their birth. He wouldn’t sacrifice himself out of duty or for the sake of some unseen future.

They had already spent more than enough time together for him to fall for her. He had made a point of expressing that, since this pampered girl was a little lacking in confidence.

Smaragdi’s whispered words were meant for Mov alone, and only she heard them. As such, Chrysos and Platina didn’t know what their parents were discussing. Even so, looking at their parents now caused the twins to smile at one another.

“Mov and Rag, getting along?”

“Getting along!”

“Yeah!”

Their mother may have been monopolizing their beloved father’s embrace, but they had each other, so they held each other’s hands tightly. With a happy feeling in their hearts, Chrysos and Platina went for a walk around the depths of the temple, which was the whole of their world. Ever since she was young she was called the “Lady Oracle,” and she was referred to as “Grand Priestess” since she became the highest ranking in the temple, but despite those high expectations, she was more than able to meet them.

Beauty always brought power alongside it.

She possessed not only beautiful features, but also had colors about her that people didn’t normally possess. As someone whose hair was a manifestation of the color most precious to those who served Banafsaj, she was a woman fitting to serve as the symbol of the temple.

A beautiful, capable, and enigmatic young leader. That was the opinion of her externally, being seen as a talented woman.

Smaragdi wouldn’t deny that assessment, either. As her teacher, he knew full well just how skilled of a prodigy she was.

But he was also well acquainted with the fact that it wasn’t all there was to her. She was a natural airhead who knew nothing of the outside world. Her actions fitting to such an assessment were known only to Smaragdi and their daughters, a sight that she only showed at her most unguarded.

Put bluntly, Mov had often caused such incidents with her airheadedness.

That day, Platina and Chrysos heard a story from their beloved father. Amongst the stories that Smaragdi told his daughters, there were quite a few heroic epics. “Heroes” weren’t born to the devil race. Even so, tales and legends about those antitheses of demon lords were also frequently told in Vassilios.

“Magical beings?”

“Magical beasts?”

What the girls were curious about then were the monsters that appeared to be defeated in the epic.

“The tales of those called heroes aren’t just about them defeating Demon Lords of Calamity, but also eliminating the magical beasts and magical beings that endanger people.”

“Magical beings? Magical beasts?”

“They’re different?”

“Ah, right... You’ve never seen any, so it’s hard to understand, huh?”

“Magical beasts” was a classification for all living things that possessed mana. It wasn’t just limited to beasts of the land, and also included birds, fish, bugs, and those humanoid beings outside of the seven races, the demi-humans.

On the other hand, there were those called “Magical Beings,” which were not animals. Such non-living beings as golems and gargoyles had mana dwelling in them, making them magical beings. They were akin to magical devices, and could occur either by design or pure random chance.

The most common type of magical beings, though, were corpses and the spirits of the dead given form by being exposed to mana. In other words, what was commonly referred to as undead monsters.

However, for these girls who were raised in secret in the depths of the temple, having hardly even seen normal beasts, it was rather difficult to understand the difference.

“...I’ll think on how to properly explain it to you. Could you wait a little longer?”

“Hmm?”

“Hm?”

Seeing Smaragdi’s troubled expression, Chrysos and Platina tilted their heads. Up until now, their father had known anything and everything and always had an answer to all their questions.

They wondered why he wouldn’t tell them. Each of them realized that her other half holding her hand was pondering the same question, so they nodded to one another.

If our father is troubled, then we should ask the other person we can count on, our mother.

Having reached the same conclusion without even needing to

exchange words, the twins looked up at their father with refreshed looks on their faces.

Smaragdi took those expressions to mean that they were being reasonable in response to his request, making him feel relieved. He had no idea that they had decided on their next course of action through eye contact alone.

If Chrysos or Platina had spoken a single word of what they were planning in the presence of their father, the disaster to come surely would have been averted.

Occasionally, Smaragdi left the temple and headed out into town for work.

When his daughters had just been babies Smaragdi was constantly by their side and didn't take his eyes off them for a moment, but now that Chrysos and Platina had grown up to be such good girls that weren't troublesome at all, he could trust them to behave themselves and hold down the fort to some degree. And it wasn't as if he left them entirely on their own. There were always ladies-in-waiting about, and their mother Mov was with them at times.

At the moment they were with the latter, so Chrysos and Platina pitter-pattered on over to their mother.

"Mov!"

"Mov, teach Ryso and Latina!"

"Teach Ryso and Latina!"

Mov was a bit surprised, hearing that from her daughters. They almost always asked their father when they had a question, and Smaragdi was always knowledgeable enough to give them a response. And so, it was a very strange feeling for Mov, having the twins ask her to teach them something.

"What is it?"

"Um, um..."

"About magical beasts and magical beings..."

"Magical beasts and magical beings?"

Mov looked confused, so her daughters continued on.

"Rag told a story."

"But Ryso and Latina didn't understand."

"How are magical beasts and magical beings different?"

"Ryso and Latina don't get it."

Having heard their alternating explanation, Mov felt she finally grasped the situation.

"In other words, you want to know the difference between magical beasts and magical beings."

"Ryso and Latina kind of get magical beasts."

"They're dangerous animals, right?"

"They also include bugs and stuff too, but that's more or less

right.”

Because Mov was raised in the temple and knew nothing of the outside world, if Smaragdi were in this place, he would want to interject all sorts of things into the conversation.

“Well then, what do you want to know?”

“What are magical beings?”

“Ryso and Latina don’t really get them.”

“Hmm...”

She gave a firm nod in response to her daughters’ question, and then continued on, “Magical beings are not living creatures... The majority of them are what are called undead. They occur when the residual thoughts of the corpses or spirits of the deceased are manifested by mana, but...”

Seeing her daughters tilt their little heads, Mov reached a conclusion which was overly hasty, as well as plain and simple.

“Hmm... It would be better to simply show you rather than try to explain.”

“Huh?”

“Really?”

Mov’s golden eyes looked to be gazing at somewhere far off in the distance. She was looking over the potential futures that only she could see, something no ordinary person was capable of.

Soon, Mov gave a satisfied smile in response to what she had surveyed.

“When something you do not know catches your interest, it is only right to try to learn about it. Therefore, it is good to study it.”

“Hmm?”

“Hmm?”

The twins tilted their heads in tandem, while Mov alone gave a satisfied nod.

Once in the past, Mov had easily slipped out of the temple in order to go see Smaragdi. She was an airhead, but she was also strangely good at taking action. By using her abilities, she was able to slip out of the depths of the temple with her daughters in tow while having confidence in their safety. However, Mov wasn’t taking them out of the temple itself this time.

“Mov?”

“What’s this place?”

The stone-built building Mov had brought her daughters to had a complex relief around its entrance, but the interior was incredibly plain and dreary. The chill felt in this place was due to more than just the air running through from below.

Just leaving their room when it was dusk out was unusual for the twins. However, they still pitter-pattered along after their mother,

who was holding a light, so as not to be left behind.

“Even very few people of the temple visit this place. It is a graveyard that has been used for generations for priests.”

“Graveyard?”

“Perhaps due to the strong power of this land and of those buried here, this place is famed for having many ghosts appear.”

Mov walked along at a brisk pace, showing no signs of being afraid. Chrysos and Platina didn’t understand what was going on in the least. They had interest in being in a new place, but they hadn’t the foggiest to what it was for.

“As long as you keep the amulets on your person, you will be in no danger.”

“Hmm?”

“Amulets? This?”

Immediately before they entered the building, Mov hung a delicately-made amulet meant to ward off evil from each of her daughter’s necks. In response to Chrysos holding hers up, Mov gave a smile and a nod.

“Yes, that is the one. Be sure not to lose it.”

With that, Mov hurried ahead of her daughters. The angle on the slick floor suddenly shifted causing the twins to fall down, and it then acted as a slide, carrying them down below.

“Gah?!”

“Wah?!”

“If you follow the path you will make it back here, so do your best and return to me.”

At the very least, if Smaragdi were there, he would have asked why in the world she was so reckless as to send their daughters off into such a place alone.

While looking up at their mother waving to them, Chrysos and Platina slid down into the depths of the graveyard, not even having time to grasp what had happened.

The two had been raised with affection under the watch of an absolute guardian in the form of their father, so they had no idea that they possessed the ability to sense such things as “ill will” and “malice.” That was something akin to the budding sprout of the power of fate protecting them, as those who had been prophesied to become demon lords, but nobody was aware of that.

Having been thrown right into the midst of the thoughts of those ghosts, whose envy and jealousy towards all living things had shifted into hatred, Platina fell into a panic.

“Gwaaaaaaah!!”

Chrysos had gripped her amulet tightly as her mother had instructed and was somewhat calm, but she jumped when she heard

Platina's scream at the appearance of the swarm of ghosts.

That proved to be the trigger. Chrysos had been holding back her tears up until then, but following suit with her sister, the dam holding the tears back burst apart.

"Aaaaaaaaah!!"

After that, the sisters held each other's hands and ran at full sprint, tears streaming from their eyes all the while.

It could be said that these sisters' courage had held out, as their legs hadn't given out from fear.

Meanwhile, Mov heard their footsteps from far away and gave a satisfied nod.

"Hmm..."

Her daughters' screams reverberated throughout the narrow graveyard, but Mov reached a rather positive conclusion, deciding that there was no problem if they had that much energy.

She was worrying about the girls, in her own way. In her childrens' future, a great many difficulties awaited them. And when that time came, she would surely not be by their side. And so, they needed to be capable of overcoming any difficulty through their own power. The dark shadow of death always followed wherever the Demon Lords of Calamity tread, after all.

Her daughters would surely need to build up a resistance to the undead, in order to protect themselves.

Mov had encountered the Second Demon Lord herself when she was young, suffering great wounds to her heart in the process, but she had been raised to be extremely tough mentally. Her overly straightforward way of thinking was that one needed to face their trauma head-on and overcome it, like she had done with the aid of that person she loved, who was so skilled at doting on her.

She was truly frighteningly airheaded.

"Oh light of heaven, grant this request by my name, and become a guide for those who are lost. 《Ghost purification》"

Mov's purple hair waved gently as she quickly chanted off her purification magic. She was born with a massive amount of mana, so even with just the magic activated by that single chant, the ghosts that had gathered behind her back were easily mowed down.

Soon after, Chrysos and Platina made it back to their mother and clinged to her desperately.

"Waaaah!"

"Mov!"

While stroking her sobbing daughters' hair to comfort them, Mov plainly stated with a smile on her face, "What you saw just now were ghosts. They lack any sense of self like those of the seven races, and are not especially dangerous."

It was certainly true that for someone like Mov, who could cast such exceptional purification magic, even a couple hundred ghosts would be nothing to fear.

“However, the classification of undead doesn’t only refer to ghosts.”

The girls had inherited their mother’s airheadedness and tendency to do things at her own pace, but they still felt an ill premonition from the smile on Mov’s face right now. However, it was just a bit too late.

“Therefore, continue your studies.”

With a *bam*, Mov flung open a door behind her. That door had a sealing spell placed over it so it couldn’t be opened easily, but she cared nothing of such a trivial matter.

It was connected to a small room made of stone.

An unnatural, dry clattering sound emerged from the darkness. Mov illuminated the interior with her light, and both Chrysos and Platina froze on the spot.

There were countless skeletons packed within that room.

“When one becomes a zombie, they not only look horrifying, but also possess a terrible stench. You should accustom yourselves to it now.”

As always, Mov’s smile remained firmly on her face.

It was too much from the very start for not just Platina, but also Chrysos.

Unlike ghosts, which lacked physical forms, the beings clattering and shaking before them now were clearly there. The impact on the girls couldn’t even be compared. All they could do was tremble and quake in one another’s arms.

Smaragdi arrived soon afterwards.

He realized upon returning from town that Mov and the girls weren’t in their room, but he didn’t raise a fuss over that. He didn’t yell out loudly or carelessly at the absence of his daughters, who were being raised in secret.

What he did first was search for the girls on his own. He wasn’t just looking at random, instead making use of search magic, which he was skilled at.

However, he found a different difficulty upon his arrival at the scene. As Smaragdi wasn’t a priest, he was restricted from entering the graveyard. He was devoted in his duties as a professional, which made that restriction push him to his limits mentally, as going into that place was something he should avoid. There would be repercussions.

But above all else, his role as a father came first.

What he found was his beloved daughters huddled in a trembling mass, no longer even able to speak. Even after seeing him, they were still so awash in terror that they couldn’t even stand.

“Mov!” Smaragdi’s reprimanding voice reverberated throughout the graveyard, with enough force behind it that even the skeletons faltered.

Even after being rebuked by Smaragdi, Mov calmly puffed up her chest with pride.

“Low-grade ghosts are of little concern. And I made sure they had amulets, so such things could not even so much as approach them.”

Instead of appearing dejected, she had the expression of a dog thinking “I did good, so praise me!” as she looked at Smaragdi.

“Furthermore, new experiences are of great use in their growth, yes? Now they should be able to deal with the undead without experiencing more fear than they need to...”

“These girls still weren’t ready to face such a thing!”

Their daughters were still young children, just barely able to take care of their day to day needs on their own.

It was certainly true that in order to protect themselves, they would need to learn how to fight and to ready to face magical beings without faltering. However, no matter how one thought about it, that wasn’t the sort of education to be given to children this young. His beloved daughters in his arms were trembling, tears streaming from their eyes.

“There’s a time and an order to all things...”

Smaragdi’s lecture continued on for a while after that.

Though he had watched out for them in that manner, for a while afterwards, Chrysos and Platina weren’t able to go into dark places, and the bedwetting that they had outgrown made a reoccurrence.

Their mother’s attempt at tough love had missed its mark, not providing the desired result.

That much was only natural.

4: Prequel: The End, the Beginning, and a Meeting

It was the eighth autumn after Chrysos and Platina had entered into the world. Those twins, who were born in early summer, were now seven.

As always, their appearances were utterly identical outside of their gold and platinum eyes. But to their parents, who watched over them every day, the differences in their personalities were growing day by day.

There were certainly many inconveniences to this small world, akin to a miniature garden, that they lived in together with their mother, Mov, who was just as much of a spoiled child as her daughters. Smaragdi wanted to show the wide world to those girls, who had only ever known the depths of the temple.

Even so, their days together were happy enough that he also wished to keep on spending such calm, gentle time together forever.

As they entered into autumn, the town of Vassilios was filled with a brilliant, joyful air.

The climate in Vassilios was unrelenting, so the harvest season, when cool winds started blowing and making things more comfortable, was greatly appreciated, even though the country wasn't very suitable to farming.

"...So it's time for the Quirmizi harvest festival, is it? To think that it's already that time of year..." Smaragdi muttered to himself while walking through town and looking around.

The temple of Banafsaj held the greatest influence in Vassilios and was in charge of government. However, it wasn't as if the country was lacking in faith in the other gods. As Vassilios had a rugged climate, their harvests were always limited. Therefore, they never neglected to hold festivals for Quirmizi, the god who governed the earth and harvests.

The town had a radiantly merry feel about it as preparations for the festival to give thanks to Quirmizi and celebrate the harvest they were given were underway.

The sight inspired an idea in Smaragdi. *I'd... like to show this to Chrysos and Platina, too.* And in his mind's eye, Mov too was naturally by his side.

His daughters and their mother weren't familiar with the normal

state of the town, but when they saw the even more brilliant sight of the festival, their expressions were sure to shine, too.

Smaragdi was aware that the circumstances those girls found themselves in meant that they couldn't let their hair down so lightly.

And so, when Smaragdi casually let that desire slip, Mov stared blankly back at him.

"You can just consider that some idle chatter. I just kind of wanted you to hear it."

It was just the two of them, as their daughters had already fallen asleep. This was the only time that she could show her own personal expressions, rather than those of the grand priestess or a mother, and when she heard Smaragdi's words, she tilted her head at the same angle that her daughters did.

"You are not the sort of person to voice an idea without any reason," she said, causing Smaragdi to give a strained laugh. However, Mov's expression was serious.

"Is something up?"

"You see right through me, Mov."

Thinking on it, the time he had spent together with Mov couldn't be called short, even for someone who had lived as long as him. And it wasn't just long, but also a time rich in happiness. And so, he ended up having such a thought.

"At some point, I'll be separated from those girls... I don't know when that will be, but... I want to leave those girls with plenty of memories before that time comes. And I don't want them to ever think of those memories as something painful or bitter."

At some point, he would sacrifice his life for the sake of his daughters. He had been prepared for that for quite some time now. And as his beloved daughters grew more and more utterly irreplaceable to him, any doubt about that fact completely and utterly vanished. Even without Mov's protection, as their father, he would gladly risk his life to protect those girls.

But he wanted to leave his daughters memories powerful enough that when the time came, even if his death left wounds on his daughter's hearts, the twins would overcome them. He wanted them both to be able to clearly say that they were happy. That was his wish.

"I may not even get to see those girls become adults. But whenever this season comes... they may end up recalling memories of me. And so I've been thinking... if possible, I'd like those to be happy memories," Smaragdi said with a slightly troubled smile, understanding that he may have been acting purely for his own satisfaction.

What he should prioritize was the safety of Mov and his daughters. And considering the importance of their existence, he

should never do such a thing.

But even so, he wanted to tell his feelings to someone, so he had opened up to Mov.

He felt that he would be satisfied just having her listen to his words with her golden eyes looking straight at him, not a hint of maliciousness to her expression.

What Smaragdi had forgotten was that Mov was a natural airhead who was unusually good at taking initiative.

Mov first got ahold of child-sized overcoats with the assistance of an undisclosed source. So that they wouldn't get in the way when covering their horns, there were cat-ear shapes attached to the hoods. She also dyed her long purple hair.

There really was a limit to how decisively one should act.

When he saw Mov with dark brown hair, Smaragdi was left at a loss for words. If anyone from the temple had saw how the Lady Oracle had ruined that precious color of Banafsaj, they would be liable to faint.

"M-Mov, what did you...?" Smaragdi asked, sounding bewildered.

"There are some spots left, but if I wear a headdress atop it, then none will notice in the darkness," Mov responded, brimming with confidence as she puffed up with pride. She didn't realize that she hadn't given an answer to his question.

"Um... Mov?"

"If you say we cannot, then I will take those two outside on my own."

"What sort of threat is that?"

It was the first outing for those naturally airheaded young girls, who knew nothing of the outside world. He couldn't imagine it would be anything but an incident-filled event.

When he recovered from the initial shock of that, Smaragdi realized that Mov had apparently made plans to take their daughters outside. She had taken action in order to realize what he had muttered about. He was glad for the consideration, but he couldn't let her do so.

While such sensible thoughts ran through Smaragdi's head, the confident expression on Mov's face didn't crumble in the least, and she continued on, "With my divine protection, I can manage to do so without you even realizing it."

He wanted to prevent a repeat of the "graveyard incident." It was no surprise that such a thought would immediately spring to Smaragdi's mind. However, when Smaragdi opened his mouth to stop Mov, he looked at her and closed it again.

Mov cheerfully put a silk veil on her head and faced Smaragdi. Such things were a common bit of fashion for women in this hot, parched land, meant to ward off the strong rays of the sun. Even her

golden eyes and horns that sparkled the same color didn't stand out when hidden by the dark colored veil. Surely no one would be able to tell she even possessed those rare colors of the Lady Oracle at a glance.

She was certainly acting out of consideration for Smaragdi's wish while thinking of their daughters. However, he saw an excitement beyond just that in her expression. At the sight before him, Smaragdi's words of objection abandoned him.

Their daughters weren't the only ones who had been raised in secret in the depths of the shrine, not knowing the outside world. It was no surprise that she would have an interest in such things too.

"So, there's no danger to you, Ryso, or Latina?"

In that case, he should give his all to make things turn out for the best, considering the risks. Having made up his mind, Smaragdi regained his usual calm and smiled. He likely had a tendency to be soft on not just his daughters, but also Mov, who was younger than him.

"I cannot say that there is no danger whatsoever. However, it is possible to make choices to lower the possibility of more dangerous futures occurring, rendering them ineffective. Changing my hair color was one such choice," Mov replied, holding out the child-sized overcoats she had prepared as she did so. "That is also why I chose hoods that hid their horns rather than ones that let them show."

It was also why she had made the very important decision of choosing triangular cat ears over round bear ears. It most certainly wasn't just because they were adorable.

"Come here Latina, Ryso."

"What is it?"

"Huuuh?"

However, it was also a fact that when the twins came over to their beckoning mother and put on the overcoats and hoods, they were even more adorable than Smaragdi had expected. The way that they hopped around merrily, excited by this unfamiliar new clothing, making them look so cute that he could go so far as to declare that real kittens didn't even compare.



Once her daughters were ready, Mov exited the room as if it was only natural. Having given up on stopping her, Smaragdi took their daughters' hands and followed behind her.

As someone who lacked such a thing, Smaragdi didn't truly understand the great power she possessed in the form of her divine protection. It was thinkable that his interference could have a negative impact. With that thought in mind, all he could do was watch over Mov's actions.

They were normally never allowed to pass through the door connecting the depths of the temple to its other sections. Apparently the girls sensed that they found themselves in a different situation than normal. The two smart girls looked at each other and pursed their lips.

Mov walked with a confident stride, occasionally stopping, and at times taking a detour while progressing through the vast temple. While doing so, they didn't pass a single priest, even though there should have been many of them about.

Smaragdi didn't like the temple's way of doing things, entrusting everything to prophecies and never thinking on their own, but at times like this, he couldn't help but feel in awe at those words from a god.

There was the power to see through everything within Mov's golden eyes. That fact was inescapable.

Smaragdi and his daughters followed along after Mov as she smoothly slipped through the vast temple grounds.

The gatekeeper guarding the exterior of the temple did not realize that Mov, with the rare colors she possessed now hidden, was the Lady Oracle herself. That was even more true of the twins, whose very existence wasn't even known to anyone but a portion of the temple's elite. They blended in with the throngs of people visiting the temple and headed into town.

What awaited them was a brilliantly colored townscape spreading out wide before them. The sky above it all was colored a gradation from red to light purple due to the sunset. It was a perfectly ordinary sight, but the girls had only seen the sky cut off by the walls of the temple, so they both stopped and looked up at it, their mouths opened wide. That alone made taking them outside worthwhile.

Mov suddenly turned around and looked at Smaragdi, an impish smile on her face. Even if she didn't say anything, it was clear from her expression that she felt glad she had taken action. While looking a little troubled, too, Smaragdi smiled back at her, as her accomplice.

There were artificial springs constructed here and there throughout town. Rather than being naturally occurring, these springs

were filled using magic by those who made their living doing so. Though there was little rain in the country, the people of this town had no need to compete over water. The air by the spring was cooled by the chilly water making it a good place to rest, so a great many people had stopped there to do so. Thanks to the need to avoid the midday heat, this evening hour was the most prosperous one for the town.

The people about town were stopping there now for more reasons than that usual one, though. Numerous pure white flowers were floating on the water's surface. They were offerings to Quirmizi, as they were thought to be symbolic of the portion of the blessings provided by that god.

The sight of those brilliant large blossoms, of a sort which didn't bloom in the temple's garden, caused a look of surprise to appear on the faces of both the girls under their matching hoods. They ran up to the shrine and reached out towards the flowers, which were floating tantalizingly out of reach. The girls weren't discouraged by that, though, and instead played around by splashing the water. Even just seeing the petals sway atop the water was apparently enough to bring them joy, as the girls laughed in tandem.

Chrysos and Platina turned around to confirm that their parents were still watching over them, gentle expressions on their faces. Their smiles grew all the brighter upon seeing Smaragdi and Mov, and they showed no signs of concern over their first time going outside the temple. They had absolute trust in their parents. So as long as they were by the girls' side, they had no reason to feel uneasy.

They were full of curiosity by nature and the town was overflowing with thing they'd never seen, and combined with the great excitement in the air, their smiles showed no sign of abating.

Smaragdi called over a person with a basket by the spring's side and handed over some coins. The four flowers he received in exchange were of the same sort as those floating on the surface of the spring, pure white ones with many layered petals.

"We place them in the spring with prayers of thanks for our everyday sustenance."

Smaragdi handed one flower each to Mov and his daughters, then placed his own gently into the spring. Chrysos and Platina obediently followed his example, each dropping their flower onto the water's surface with a serious look on her face.

Finding it strange that Mov didn't do the same, Smaragdi looked over at her. Mov was holding the flower to her chest, looking a little hesitant.

"Mov?" Smaragdi called out, sounding perplexed.

"I know that there is no helping it, as it is a ritual," Mov said,

letting her flower go into the spring. After thinking on his past actions for a bit, Smaragdi reached a satisfactory answer.

“Now that I think of it, I’ve never given you a flower before, have I?”

Apparently he had hit the mark. She had an unpleasant expression, pouting like a child. Rather than denying her feelings, he hugged her.

“I was wrong. What sort of flowers are your favorite, Mov? I’ve never asked before, right?”

“In the temple, I never had the chance to experience such things...”

“I see. In that case, I’ll have to think on what type of flower suits you best,” Smaragdi said with a smile, moving his hand from around her waist to her hand instead.

“You’re unfamiliar with the town, so I don’t want you to get lost.”

Mov blushed ever so slightly and gripped his hand back tightly. They then each offered their open hands to their daughters. Holding their father and mother’s hands, Platina and Chrysos looked up at their parents with smiles on their faces.

Today, the street corners throughout town were decorated with flowers, creating a gorgeous atmosphere. Even the shadows cast by the walls dyed red by the light of the setting sun added to the beautiful colors of the town.

Platina and Chrysos stopped and stared at everything. They’d point something out and then ask their parents. They lifted and raised their hands while looking at their own shadows in a strange sort of dance. Their parents looked on them with affection all the while as this was going on, finding everything they did adorable.

Before long, they arrived at the temple of Quirmizi. It was a modest building, not even comparing to the grand temple of Banafsaj where they lived. It was decorated with metallic ornamentation. Seeing the many designs there for the first time, the girls were completely captivated.

“Rag, what’s that?”

“Ah, that imagery represents the favor of Quirmizi... There are a lot of plants that don’t exist in this country shown there.”

The sparkle in their daughters’ were clearly the shine of curiosity. The metal relief showed plants from all ages and nations in great detail. Smaragdi was also aware that each relief displayed a season or region, allowing it to serve as an illustrated reference for plants.

“Ryso wants to see more! Rag, pick Ryso up!”

“Calm down, Ryso. Ah, don’t you look at me with that face too, Latina.”

“Pick up Latina, too!”

For someone as slender as Smaragdi, picking up both his daughters at the same time when they demanded it was getting more and more difficult day by day. Even so, he'd never be able to refuse them when they were begging like this.

"Wow, amazing!"

"Over that way, Rag, that way!"

With his daughters chattering away in high spirits as he held them, Smaragdi steadily walked along. Mov walked alongside him, as if snuggling up to him. As both of Smaragdi's hands were occupied by their daughters, she instead got even closer to him than normal.

Mov gently, affectionately pulled Chrysos's hood back up, as it was about to fall due to the girl getting overly excited. No matter how one looked at her, she was a kind, caring mother.

As they walked, they circled around the building. It was normally a quiet place without many people around, but as today was a festival, there were a great many visitors.

Since it was a harvest festival, this year's bounty was piled up atop the temple's altar. It was precisely because the environment was so harsh, limiting the crops they could obtain, that this ritual was held out of pure faith and thanks to the god.

"I suppose it'll be starting soon," Smaragdi muttered.

"Hmm?"

"What will?"

The two girls in Smaragdi's arms tilted their heads. Mov also looked to be confused. Seeing their reactions, Smaragdi smiled and beckoned Mov over to a place a little bit separated from where the crowd was gathering.

"The offering dance is starting. They'll put on a dance, starting from here and going all through town, to places like that spring where we were before. The dance at the spring will be flashier, but more people will gather there, so I thought this place would be better for taking it easy and watching."

Not long after Smaragdi finished his explanation, numerous priests started appearing from within the temple. They took command of the surroundings through sheer volume as they wildly played their percussion instruments and flutes, making sounds that differed greatly from what could be heard in the temple of Banafsaj and clearing away any gloom coming from the now very dim natural light.

The twins clung to their father at first out of shock at the loud noises, but when they saw the priestesses in their brilliant outfits, the girls' gazes grew fixed on them. As they watched the elegant dance, it was as if they had forgotten to even blink.

Smaragdi glanced over at Mov, and found that she was admiring her enraptured daughters more than the dance itself. Noticing his gaze

she looked back at him, and they smiled at one another.

It would be difficult to exchange words at the moment, as they would be drowned out by the musical performance. While Smaragdi was thinking that, Mov intertwined her own arm around his. As he was holding both their daughters at the moment he couldn't do anything in response, but he looked at Mov, whose cheeks were a little flushed with embarrassment at being so close.

"...I'm really glad that I met you," Smaragdi whispered quietly, thinking he wouldn't mind if she didn't hear. Mov gave a happy smile back. "No matter what happens from now on... those feelings of mine won't change."

"...Right."

Mov closed her eyes and rested her head on Smaragdi's shoulder. He felt her warmth, along with that ever so slight weight on him.

"I am also truly glad that you are the one by my side, Smaragdi."

Hearing their daughters' shouts of joy, their gazes returned to the dance. The dance at the temple was reaching its climax. The dancers had been moving in perfect sync, but now they created a slight lag in between their movements. Their hands wearing thin golden rings fluttered as if creating ripples, and their dazzling matching orange outfits, the color of the god they worshipped, spread out like flowers.

The percussion rang out loudly enough to shake one's eardrums. As the aftereffects lingered silence returned to the temple and the dance came to an end, the extraordinary giving way once more to the ordinary.

They noticed now that the setting sun was already sinking beyond the dunes of the desert. The last vestiges of red disappeared from the sky, and were replaced by a twinkling sea of stars.

The excitement from the dance they had just seen still hadn't abated, so the two daughters seemed to be more skipping along than walking. So that the girls wouldn't stumble and trip in the darkness, Mov cast a gentle magic light.

Smaragdi and Mov walked along slowly hand in hand, watching over the girls as they enjoyed themselves.

There was surely a great panic back in the temple around now. Even so, they wanted this time to last even just a little bit longer.

With the power of Mov's divine protection, it wasn't a difficult task to return to the temple. Just like when they had left, she easily led them back to the depths of the temple. Thanks to Mov's ability, it was as if she was simply ignoring the chamberlains, who were running around looking for her and the girls who weren't in their room, as they couldn't cause an uproar about the matter.

Seeing that the twins had been lulled to sleep, having tired themselves out from playing, Mov was completely detached from the

questioning and reprimands.

†

One day, their peaceful, yet isolated, time together suddenly approached its end.

Though the role of highest-ranking priestess had been entrusted to Mov, the previous grand priestess, Epilogi, still held a great deal of authority. The start and end of everything came when she handed down a prophecy.

“It is the light of the sun that illuminates our future.”

Those words from a god were like a fragment of a poem, and told of the future that the people wanted to know.

“The light of the moon will lead to lordly ruin.”

The word sun contained the letter indicating gold. Furthermore the letter indicating platinum was included in the word for moon.

Smaragdi’s face froze when he heard the words of that prophecy.

He had had his misgivings all this time. He had felt keenly many times since coming to live with Mov that those who were affiliated with the temple had blind faith in those words from the god, considering them absolutely just. Fortunately for him, the current highest-ranking priestess in the temple was Mov, who was his personal pupil. Rather than teaching her to immediately confirm or deny the temple’s way of thinking, he had instead made sure that she knew how to think on her own as to whether something was right or wrong.

Furthermore, having served as an advisor in the temple for so many years, Smaragdi had gained quite a bit of popularity himself. The reason someone like himself, who wasn’t even a priest, had heard the contents of Epilogi’s prophecy, was because of his various pupils. They also informed him of other matters concerning the state of the temple. As the grand priestess, Mov was stuck in the middle of the turbulent maelstrom that the temple had become. She was even more busy than she had been, and the time she could spend with her family was quite limited.

“The circumstances seem to have grown rather dire. The Lady Oracle has vigorously objected, but...” Aspida reported on the temple meeting that had been called, and Smaragdi’s face showed clear discomfort in turn. He was calm by nature, and it was incredibly uncommon to see him express such emotions so openly.

“I’m sure it was those geezers saying such foolish things, right? They may have been loyal subjects back in Lady Epilogi’s day, but those rust-headed fools who have given up on thinking entirely should have been dismissed right away.”

“Guru...”

“I know that you can’t speak ill of those old fools considering your position. Just informing me of the state of things like this is plenty. Thank you, Aspida.”

Smaragdi’s sharp words had been only natural, considering the cruel words directed towards his beloved daughter.

With this prediction from Epilogi, the idea to immediately judge the girl a “criminal” was raised by those who were considered conservative even amongst members of the temple.

Those that Smaragdi called “old fools” were making light of the statements from Mov, who should have been the highest-ranking priestess, and though their minds had curdled with age, their positions alone made them difficult to handle.

In this country, the word “lord” indicated the rightful ruler of the nation, the First Demon Lord. Having lost the previous ruler and the candidate that followed, this country had been waiting for quite some time for a new king to be enthroned. As citizens, that was no different for Smaragdi or Mov.

But with that said, there was no way they would ever accept the absurd act of Platina, who hadn’t committed a single crime, being judged a criminal based on a prophecy.

Smaragdi and Mov had Platina and Chrysos remain within their room. Though where they could go had been limited before, up until now, their daughters had enjoyed a certain degree of freedom. It was painful, having to steal away even more of their freedom and shut them away in a single room. However, they had no choice but to do so. There was no telling when the conservative priests would take stronger measures. Their decision was also heavily influenced by a desire to shield the girls from the malice, fear, and hatred that was being directed at Platina since the prophecy was handed down.

However, Smaragdi also understood where those feelings were coming from. The words of Epilogi, the previous grand priestess, held great weight, and so her prophecy that the girl would bring ruin in the future aroused great unease in people’s hearts.

Chrysos and Platina were both sensitive to the ill will held by others.

Sensing that whirlpool of malice swirling within the temple with her at the center, Platina trembled, and seeing her other half that way, Chrysos joined hands with her sister and appeared frightened herself.

Smaragdi and Mov were both aware that appearing nervous only made the girls more unnerved, but even so, neither were able to bring themselves to relax.

When Mov at last returned to their room late at night, she had a look of exhaustion about her. Her expression didn’t brighten even after seeing Smaragdi and her daughters. Sensing clearly that today

had not gone well, Smaragdi spoke up to comfort her, saying, “Are you alright, Mov? You shouldn’t push yourself too—”

“It is not a matter of pushing myself too hard or not. In order to protect my child, I will exert every ounce of energy I have in my body,” she interrupted, causing Smaragdi to give a bit of an awkward smile.

“Right. But it’s important for Platina’s sake, too. If you end up collapsing, then you won’t be able to protect her anymore.”

“I understand that.”

While running his fingers through her purple hair, Smaragdi asked, “Mov, are there any records of Lady Epilogi’s prophecies ever proving wrong?”

From his analytical tone, it was clear his question was said not out of desperation, but in order to ensure he was thinking things through using accurate information.

Smaragdi was also having his heart torn apart by anger and impatience. But it wouldn’t be possible to make things take a turn for the better that way. Understanding that, he decided that rather than letting his emotions show and screaming out, he should do his best to think things through calmly.

Mov, on the other hand, was letting her agitation and unease clearly show.

When she was carrying out her duties as grand priestess, she would never let others see her tremble. The one and only time she would expose her own weakness was in front of Smaragdi. That was the compromise that woman, far younger than Smaragdi, had reached with her own feelings.

“As far as I am aware, Lady Epilogi’s prophecies have never erred,” Mov replied in a hoarse voice, causing Smaragdi to quietly think for a bit.

“With that prophecy you once received, and the open throne... with this prophecy, I think it’s safe to assume that Chrysos will become the First Demon Lord.”

“Smaragdi...”

“Even so, I can’t imagine Platina ever wishing to harm Chrysos. The only way I can think of that occurring...” Smaragdi started, a clearly disgusted expression uncharacteristically showing clearly on his face, “would be after she’d been driven into the depths of despair after being exposed to all this absurd malice.”

These two sisters were currently very close to each other, but there was no guarantee that they would remain that way forever. However, for such naturally kind girls to be warped that greatly, it would clearly require something to happen to influence them greatly. That was why their parents thought they absolutely needed to protect

the two of them.

Mov stifled her own anxiety and raised her face.

"There's a possibility that Platina could harm Chrysos without meaning to do so."

"...That may be possible. Can you see that using your divine protection?"

"Whether I can or not, I will still try... Otherwise, there is no purpose to me even having such a power," said Mov, driven by her emotions. Smaragdi put his arms around her, holding back his own turbulent feelings all the while. He was well aware that she loved their twin daughters every bit as much as he did.

Even though it was out of love, perhaps she was unqualified to serve as a ruler, being unable to pass impartial judgment on her own daughters.

"I feel the same way that you do."

Even so, Smaragdi swore in his heart that he would never deny her right to do so.

"For me now, if those girls were placed on a scale with the nation of Vassilios itself, they'd win out handily, after all."

Even if they couldn't find a clear answer to the problem, they were both prepared to never stop struggling against that fate. The greatest sources of support for the two parents were their beloved, darling daughters.

The two sisters had been close to start with, but now they wouldn't leave each other's side for even an instant. Even now they slept together in the same bed, cuddling as close to one another as they could.

The girls understood that the circumstances they found themselves in had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. And it was hard to imagine that Platina in particular hadn't noticed that "bad thing" was directed towards her. She was so observant that the word "smart" didn't even begin to cover it.

Their parents weren't aware of the ability to detect ill will that the girls possessed, but they knew that their daughters weren't dense enough to fail to notice something was out of sorts. They never let even a slight change slip them by, after all.

The first one of them to break out in tears was always Platina, who was more of a timid crybaby. But lately, she didn't seem to be even crying anymore, as if she had forgotten how.

"...Chrysos has been crying, and she's always holding Platina's hand. It's like she's trying to do it in place of Platina, who can't even cry anymore," Smaragdi said in a bitter voice, thinking back on the state his daughters were in. Those girls had been so lively and cheerful, but now they not only didn't complain about being shut

away in a single room, they actually cowered in a corner of that dark room, as if hiding. They were surely sharing in their terror. Chrysos in particular was always hugging her other half, as if trying to defend Platina from that “bad thing” directed towards her. She kept on desperately protecting her sister.

“I never imagined it could be so painful, not being able to take someone’s place.”

It was no surprise that Smaragdi ended up feeling helpless and angry, having watched his daughters remain in such a state. He felt as if he could understand a bit of the desire those demon lords called Calamities held to destroy everything. He even felt like he wanted to drive away all of those who brought harm to his beloved daughter.

“It may be times like this that cause people to wish for power...” Smaragdi muttered, and Mov hugged him a little more tightly with the arms already around his back.

Smaragdi had exposed a portion of his true feelings and let the unrest in his voice be heard before Mov, but he didn’t do so in front of his daughters. At the very least, he didn’t want to cause his daughters to be even more frightened. Because it was for the sake of his beloved daughters and no one else, he stifled the feelings in his heart.

“Latina... Ryso... my precious daughters...”

He hugged the girls, who hadn’t moved from the corner of the room that was becoming their normal position. He had taken care to use a gentle, kind voice when he called their names.

“Both Mov and I love the two of you. That much will never, ever change. No matter what happens, we’ll always be on your side... remember that. Latina, Ryso...” he said, his words filled with love. Those words were unshaken, coming from the depths of his heart. That was precisely why he felt the need to say them, even if they didn’t reach his daughters in their current state.

“Rag...” Chrysos alone said in response, her voice sounding like she was about to break down in tears. Sniffling all the while, she buried her face in Smaragdi’s chest. Even while doing so, she didn’t let go of Platina’s hands.

Platina didn’t really react, remaining silent as she looked down, her face completely pale. Even so, when Smaragdi gently stroked Platina’s horn, as if enveloping it in his hand, Platina reached out and grabbed his clothing. Even from that frail motion, he could see that she was clearly still relying on him, bringing him an extraordinary sense of relief.

What could he do for the sake of this girl? How could he aid his daughters? While thinking on such things, Smaragdi hugged the girls tight.

Epilogi’s prediction, that Platina would someday “lead to lordly

ruin," could not be overturned.

Surely there was someone far more suited to such a destiny than a kindhearted girl like Platina. When thinking such a thing, Mov remembered a terror she had started to forget.

That presence had dyed the whole of the world she could see the color of despair on that day when she was young. That being smiling amidst spurting blood took the form of a young girl, only making her seem all the more warped and repulsive.

The Second Demon Lord.

She slaughtered others with only the act of killing itself as her goal. That demon lord had appeared before a young Mov swinging a blade splattered in fresh blood, an utterly overjoyed smile on her face. Even now, Mov could still clearly hear her voice.

"It's no fun to kill so easily. Perhaps letting them grow up a bit further makes for more interesting toys... What about you, I wonder?" the demon lord whispered in a voice so sweet it almost felt like it would give you heartburn, reaching out her slender fingers towards Mov, who was unable to even move. "What lovely gold and purple. It's very rare to see such beautiful colors. I truly, truly adore things that are rare." Her almost ominously red lips twisted into a grin. "It would be a waste to kill you now. I think it would be better to let you grow a bit further before adding you to my collection... It should be all the more enjoyable, having waited plenty."

The demon lord's fingers smeared a good amount of fresh blood on Mov's white cheeks. That blood belonged to that child who she had only just recently been talking to...

Mov cut off her recollection there, shaking her head from side to side. She gripped her hand tight, as it had started trembling without her even realizing it.

She couldn't let herself falter over this level of terror. She wasn't the same person she had been at that time. She was no longer someone who simply needed to be protected.

There were people she wanted to protect. She wanted to protect them no matter what, even if she was up against a demon lord.

"The Second Demon Lord... if Chrysos is determined to be the candidate for the First Demon Lord, then that girl will surely someday be exposed to the malice of that Calamity..."

There was no way it would be possible to conceal her forever.

Since a prediction that "a new king has been decided" was auspicious news, making it all the easier to become a topic of gossip. It would be impossible to keep everyone quiet. At some point it would come to light. And that time was drawing closer moment by moment.

This time, Mov would protect her.

Alongside that determination, Mov also employed her own power.

The complex intertwining web of possible futures were like the shadows cast by the countless branches of a large tree, so even if one attempted to decipher them, it wasn't an easy task to do so. Even so, Mov gazed at those futures, which only she could see. She pursued the fragments that led her to futures where her beloved daughter came to be called responsible for ruin.

Those many, many possibilities—

And so, she arrived at a single conclusion.

“The Second Demon Lord finding Platina. Amongst the futures I saw, in order to protect both of our daughters, that absolutely must be avoided.”

Hearing Mov's words, Smaragdi frowned a bit.

“From what I've heard, the Second Demon Lord has been seen accompanied by those with mana traits... but Platina doesn't have one, right? Is it not a requirement that those she seeks for her attendants possess one?”

“That demon lord... she said that she liked things that were ‘rare,’” Mov replied, causing Smaragdi's expression to stiffen.

“If she learns that the First Demon Lord has a twin sister... the Second Demon Lord will be certain to come after Platina...”

Mov couldn't deny those words. To someone like Mov, who could see countless possibilities, the word “certain” carried significant weight. However, as it had an incredibly high possibility of occurring, she couldn't dismiss what he had said.

“Mov. Can you see what will happen if the Second Demon Lord learns of Platina... that the new First Demon Lord has a twin sister?”

“...she'd be a toy,” Mov replied, shaking with resentment at the future she had seen. “Platina would be taken away, and her mind would be broken. And then, Chrysos would also...”

“...I see. That certainly would be a path to ruin.”

That would surely be a more painful, tragic future than simply being killed.

A broken Platina would be the sort of heartrending sight he'd never, ever want to see. If that happened, Chrysos would also be pulled along by her other half and lose her mind as well. And that surely wouldn't be the end of things. That demon lord loved bloodshed and slaughter. She derived supreme joy from toying with the lives of others. She would surely force the two to meet and force them to kill one another. No matter which of them was left alive, that was surely a future worthy of being described as “ruin.”

“I've lived here for a long time now, but I'm not especially devout... But even so...” Smaragdi whispered with a smile. “I believe in your power, in your words. I know that you love our daughters more than anyone.”

According to Mov's prediction, in order to protect the two of them, it was an indispensable requirement that the Second Demon Lord not find out about them. In that case, he would have to craft the best possible plan for their sake.

"Let's get Platina away from this country."

Mov had likely foreseen those words from Smaragdi as well. She didn't say anything, simply wearing a pained expression on her face like she was swallowing down all her emotions.

"Let's accept the decision to judge that girl a criminal."

Even if that resulted in her being called a criminal and exposed to intense malice, it was far preferable to losing her.

If they took Platina, who was under the care of the temple, and fled, then pursuers would come after them and their names would be known as great criminals. In order to lawfully take Platina not only out of the temple but also the country, then the most reasonable method was to have her be judged a criminal and sentenced to exile.

And so, Smaragdi made a decision that seemed heartless. And at the same time, he made one further decision, too.

"Surely, at that time... it will be a final farewell."

Mov silently threw her arms around Smaragdi. Smaragdi felt great relief from the way that he could see straight through to her heart from the way that she was slightly trembling.

She was also finding it hard to part, just as he was. But it had been surely decided since the first time they met, that this farewell would come.

"There's no helping it, Mov. You need to protect Chrysos. I'll protect Platina. What I can do is limited, but I'll do everything that I can."

"Smaragdi..."

"Take care of Ryso, alright. Of our precious daughter, who will be an important leader for our race... I'm sure that's something that only you can do, Mov."

She had never wanted to hear those words of farewell, told in Smaragdi's oh so kind voice, so Mov couldn't hold back those tears from flowing and streaming down her cheek any longer.

And then, that time came at last.

Chrysos had a look of astonishment on her face as she looked at the hands wrenched away from her. She seemed to give a silent scream to her mother holding her back and her father taking Platina away.

"Latina... It's time to say farewell to Ryso."

His two daughters made faces like they didn't understand their father's words.

"Why...?" Chrysos forced out in a hoarse voice, staring straight at

Smaragdi. He had watched over that child ever since she was born. He most certainly didn't wish to be separated from her.

"Ryso, make sure you listen to what Mov tells you. You may not understand anything right now, but you'll surely gain the power you need to get her back... I'm certain you will."

"...Rag?"

"I love you. You're my precious daughter, Ryso. Please, grow up to be happy. And never forget that's what I wish for you."

Chrysos wasn't able to understand the meaning of her father's words. She had thought of her everyday life with her parents and her other half as something that would continue forever, unchanging. She didn't know anything else. They were clever girls, but they had no idea that something so obvious in their lives could suddenly change like that.

"No..."

Platina, who had been pulled away from her, couldn't even speak. It was all she could manage to reach out towards Chrysos, who was also stretching her arms out towards her sister while weeping.

"No, no, no!"

All the young Chrysos was able to do was yell out those words of defiance. Tears streaming from her eyes, she reached out towards her other half, trying to get her back. However, her petrified body didn't possess enough strength to escape from her mother's arms.

"Ryso..." Platina called out her name for the last time in an ever so faint voice.

That sight of her calling out and holding out a hand that would never reach her just as that door closed was the last time that Chrysos saw her other half. And that was also her eternal farewell with her father, who carried off her other half beyond the door with a sad look on his face.



Smaragdi didn't let Platina go from his arms up until the very end. And yet, in the end, callous hands still ultimately pried apart the young girl and her father.

In that space meant for judging criminals, there were several elderly high-ranking priests lined up. Faced with such unknown people in this strange space, Platina's terror grew all the worse. She had been ripped away from her father, her final remaining ally, and was faced with words filled with such hatred that they sounded like a curse. The word "heartrending" didn't even begin to cover it.

There were no tears in Platina's eyes as she silently trembled. Her big, gray eyes emotionlessly reflected the faces of those priests looking at her as a criminal with abusive, cold gazes.

Smaragdi let out a groan seeing that normally so expressive girl make such a face, having to hold himself back from wailing. Swallowing down emotions so strong they made him feel like he was going to cough up blood, he simply watched as the innocent Platina was disparaged. Because it was to save his daughters, he desperately endured what would normally be unbearable.

The judgment was announced. Through arguments so foolish he felt the word "foolish" wasn't even close to enough, his young daughter was ruled a great criminal. And before his very eyes, one of those priests broke off her left horn, the same color as her father's.

In that way, a young girl was marked with the brand of a criminal.

By the time that his beloved daughter was returned to Smaragdi's arms, she was in an even worse state than before. Curses that Smaragdi could never let his daughter hear whirled around in his heart towards those priests who could drive a young girl into such a corner and yet still look down upon her as a criminal.

Smaragdi expressed his intention to leave the country alongside his daughter, who had been sentenced to exile. If he hadn't done so, then he would never have even been able to hold her in his arms again.

Chrysos, who was determined to become the new king, and the grand priestess, Mov, were forbidden from meeting with Platina, who had the disgrace of being a "criminal" thrust upon her. So that neither of their daughters would have to be alone, because of their love for both of them, their parents had chosen to separate.

The anxiety of having lost that other half who had always been by her side only seemed to torment Platina further. She clung to Smaragdi, the only person she had left, like a baby.

"Rag..." Platina said in a voice so faint it was difficult to pick up, but even so, Smaragdi didn't miss it.

“What is it?”

“Is Latina a bad girl? Do Ryso and Mov... hate Latina now, because the prophecy said she’s bad?”

Smaragdi’s heart screamed out from having his daughter ask him such a question. He felt a feeling that went beyond mere hatred for all of the priests in that place.

Even so, for his daughter’s sake, he hid the contents of his heart and responded in a kind voice, “That’s not it, Latina. Mov and Ryso both love you dearly. You’re precious to them.”

He would guide this girl until the bitter end. He reminded himself that that was the duty he must carry out.

“They both think of you as precious. Just like how you feel about them, you’re every bit as important to them.

“...then... why...?”

While sensing the meaning behind her trembling voice, Smaragdi touched the base of the horn that his daughter had lost.

“To protect you, and Ryso, too.”

They had made this choice in order to protect their precious daughters. To make it even just a little more likely that the girls would have a happy future.

“I want you to never forget this: Ryso adores you, Latina. And the same goes for Mov and myself, too.”

As she was now, Platina didn’t react much even to Smaragdi’s words. There was no helping that, though. The wounds she had suffered were simply too great.

Smaragdi once more stroked the broken horn of the girl in his arms, not only unable to move, but not even able to react, and started walking. They exited the temple which he had always wanted to take her out of, though not ever in this manner.

“Guru...”

Aspida and the other pupils who adored Smaragdi had been waiting near the temple’s entrance. Their faces were all full of concern for Smaragdi and his daughter. Though there was of an aspect of disgust towards criminals with only one horn amongst devils, they instead looked pained to see such a young girl as Platina suffer such a great wound which would never disappear.

“Please, take a number of us along with you.”

“This is not something you should bear on your own, Guru.”

“So please...”

Hearing his pupils all speak out unanimously, a faint smile crossed Smaragdi’s face. If the era were to come when they held true power, then this temple and nation would change at least a bit.

And so, he couldn’t accept their proposal.

“Rather than worrying about us, I’d like you to lend your aid to

Chrysos and Mov from now on.”

The ones who would be responsible for this nation in the future were people equally as precious to Smaragdi as the girl he held in his arms.

“Mov and Chrysos will be in need of as many people they can trust as possible... After all, I’m no longer able to be helpful to them... I’d like you to think of this as my will.”

He knew it was an unfair way of phrasing things. Having been told such a thing, his pupils looked down, seeming troubled as to how to respond.

Even so, he wanted them to support Mov, who would be in charge of the country from now on, and Chrysos, who would become the nation’s ruler, in order to move the country in a new direction.

“As a teacher, I’m truly grateful... to have students such as yourselves.”

Smaragdi looked over his pupils with a gentle smile, then turned his back to the temple and slowly walked away. Even though he felt their gazes on his back, Smaragdi didn’t turn around even once.

He was obviously aware that it was reckless to head off on a journey with his young daughter with such a minimal amount of luggage. To start with, the amount of luggage Smaragdi could carry by himself was limited. It was a journey carried out without a sufficient amount of equipment or provisions. And naturally, there was no way that the sentence of exile faced by a great criminal from the harsh country of Vassilios and the town of the same name would be so light.

Even so, he walked onwards, leading his daughter by her hand.

As Platina was still young and Smaragdi lacked a robust physique, their journey didn’t proceed as planned. Even so, they still advanced onwards, bit by bit.

Smaragdi’s goal was to reach a nation of humans.

In Vassilios, a country of devils, it was impossible to know where the Second Demon Lord’s retainers could be hiding. It was difficult to tell such things just by looking. That was a big reason why he hadn’t decided to live in hiding in any of the villages surrounding town.

And... if nothing else, rumors would spread.

While Vassilios was a closed off nation, as he had lived close to the central seat of government, Smaragdi had been able to obtain a little bit of information on other countries.

Apparently the neighboring country of Laband currently has a hero, the antithesis of a demon lord... In order to protect this child from the Second Demon Lord, I’m prepared to grasp at any straws that I can.

Surely a hero would have no reason to extend a hand to save a child from another race. Smaragdi wasn’t that much of an optimist. But even so, he would play any hand he could for the sake of

protecting his child.

As her father, he intended to do anything he could for the sake of his innocent, beloved daughter, who didn't grumble or complain even on this long journey, which she was unaccustomed to. Teaching Platina healing magic was one example.

As a sort of play, he even now taught her how to control mana. For devils, who could all use magic, it was deeply tied to their lifestyle.

Even so, it was normally unthinkable to teach a child of less than ten to use magic. But since he had no idea what would happen or when under their present circumstances, Smaragdi constantly trained her in the words making up chants, so that she could defend herself. Rather than simple chants, he had taught her proper, beautiful ones that could be used as a foundation for casting any magic. Using attack and defensive magic was difficult. If she ended up running out of mana and fainting, that could actually place her in even greater danger.

Platina hardly ever even smiled anymore, but at those times, her expression grew just a little brighter, which was another big reason he did so.

Seated atop Smaragdi's knee, Platina repeated after her father with some difficulty, and a light of the Holy attribute lit up in her hand.

She was naturally curious and desired to improve herself, and so it seemed that even under these circumstances, she still found joy in learning new things. Sensing his daughter's strong power to live on, Smaragdi praised the girl and hugged her tight.

"You're amazing, Latina. You really are a spectacular child... I'm so proud of you."

Smaragdi had started to become aware of her ability, worthy of being called a "power to live." She was sensitive to ill will. It had been displayed throughout their journey, and helped save Smaragdi, who wasn't used to traveling. Platina could sense where magical beasts were, and was able to sense when flora and fauna were poisonous.

Smaragdi himself was the one who had raised her and taught her all kinds of things. He was able to sense that rare and unusual power was something akin to the divine protection granted by the gods.

"...That's right. Chrysos wasn't the only one who was prophesied to become king," Smaragdi said with a sigh of realization. She wouldn't be the First Demon Lord. And he was also aware that the thrones of the other demon lords were all currently filled. However, this girl would also surely also become a demon lord.

Demon lords were chosen by the gods to become one, and were in turn protected by fate.

In that case, he should use all of the time remaining to him in order to guide this girl.

Smaragdi didn't have an overly strong constitution to begin with, and over the course of the long journey, which he was unaccustomed to doing, he had become out of sorts in various ways. That was to say, he had caught an illness.

Illnesses couldn't be recovered simply through the use of healing magic. Knowing that, Smaragdi chose to use magic as life-support for his failing body. It most certainly wasn't a solution to the fundamental problem. Even so, in order to remain by his daughter's side until the very end, he kept on fooling his body and pushing himself too far, day after day.

And so, by the time that the end drew near, Smaragdi didn't even know what his own illness was.

"It's alright, Latina. You'll definitely be happy someday."

He made sure not to show his daughter a pained face.

"I can still clearly remember the day you were born. When you were born, there was a rainbow... a large, beautiful rainbow spread across the sky."

He spoke words of blessing. Words that were a prayer.

"Rainbows appear in the sky when the gods are looking down over the land. You... both of you were born with the gods watching over you."

Those words were full of a desire that this girl become happy. They were full of a hope that this girl wouldn't be driven to the depths of despair and become a "Calamity," hating and wishing to destroy everything.

"So you'll be fine. You'll definitely be happy. That's all that I want."

The man once called "Guru" prayed for that, thinking that if he at least had the power to guide her properly through her life, he hoped he had done so.

"It's alright."

Even so, he had wanted to be there for her longer. With a smile, he hid those regrets and pain that he couldn't help but feel. He had often felt that if he gently smiled, it would also help to calm Mov and his daughters.

He looked up powerlessly and saw a deep forest spreading out wide. Between the trees, he could see the sky.

"Ah..." He let out a sigh. He wasn't especially devout, but he couldn't help but think of this as a mercy from the gods.

He could see a rainbow.

Even at this moment when he had to let her go, this girl was being protected by the will of the gods. She would surely be saved. That was

what he believed.

“See, there’s a rainbow. You’re protected by fate.”

And so, he prayed. He was powerless, unable to do anything else, but even so, he prayed for his daughter’s happiness.

“Please, please be happy.”

Up until the very end.

“From now on, I’ll be watching over you from the other side of the rainbow, as well.”





Sitting in front of her father, who had stopped moving, the young girl was at a loss.

She didn't know what she should do.

Her gentle parents and her twin sister who she was closer to than anyone else, her other half, had been the entirety of her world, and now she had lost everything.

She didn't even know how to cry. Even if she shed tears, there were not gentle hands around to comfort her anymore. She thought that perhaps it would be best to simply sit by her father's side and let herself rot away, too. After all, there was no longer anyone left who needed her.

However...

Her father's final wish was for her to be happy. She didn't know what she should do, and she couldn't imagine that she could ever become happy. But to deny that possibility would be to deny her father's final wish.

And so, she stood.

She decided to try her best to fulfill her father's last wish.

And then, that girl who had kept on struggling all on her own met him.

That encounter had been the start of everything for that girl, who had had the mark of a criminal thrust upon her.

And thus, our story began.



"You are the Eighth Demon Lord's retainer, yes?"

When she saw the young man also known as the Platinum Hero in that place where she had foreseen her own demise, she was incredibly calm.

Her intention wasn't to be praised as the Purple Lady Oracle, or to be thought of as a saint who would even sacrifice her very life for the sake of king and country.

Those countless expectations were nothing but a heavy burden. She wasn't looking at things so philosophically, nor was she such an excellent, perfect person.

Even so, she put her very life on the line, risking everything in order to select the best possible future so she could protect her child.

And it was also atonement for having sacrificed that man she loved, who was already gone from this world. If she broke along the way and threw everything away, then she would lose the precious

daughter she had with him.

She couldn't let the loss of that beloved man, who was surely no longer anywhere in the world, be in vain. She would never let that come to pass.

And so, she wasn't acting as the exceptional Lady Oracle, but as a single mother wishing to protect her child.

She would sacrifice herself for the sake of her country and her people living there. That was certainly also her intention. Her beloved daughter was there, after all, striving to lead the populace as their king. Even if she couldn't be by her side, she had decided to do what she could for the sake of that child and the country she led.

The youth with the nickname containing the word "platinum."

Her meeting with him met that she was progressing down the path towards the ideal future that she wished. That they were moving towards a future where those girls could surely be happy. That they were being rewarded, for all the choices they had made, her and him.

When she learned of the existence of the Eighth Demon Lord, which existed outside of the natural order, she had realized the true meaning behind the prophecy that her daughters had received. Just as had been predicted, both of those girls had become "kings."

Furthermore, the demon lords were being led to ruin. That enemy who was her hated enemy... That daughter of hers would grant the dearest wishes of a great many people.

To her, one with the power to see the future, it was a future she could believe in.

She was also aware that she would never again meet the man who she loved. She sensed that he was no longer anywhere in this world.

She also wanted to meet her beloved daughters just one more time, but she knew that wish wouldn't be fulfilled, either.

Even so, meeting this youth was a blessed opportunity.

This was the man who was chosen by Platina, her precious daughter she was separated from when the girl was still young. It was proof that she was still living in good health.

And this man was desperately struggling to get that precious girl back. She felt assured that her daughter was very precious to him. Surely this youth had no way of knowing how much relief that tale spread throughout the human race, "The Tale of the Platinum Hero and the Fairy Princess," had brought her.

That girl had found and chosen a special partner. She would surely have a happy future ahead of her. That wasn't a prediction from a priestess with divine protection from Banafsaj, but rather the wish of a single mother for her daughter's happiness.

The young man in front of her removed the glove on his left hand. She was also aware that that was proof that girl had made him her

retainer, a show of her trust in him.

It was proof that one was under the control of the demon lord who was their master, so that “name” that was a symbol of the strong compelling force held over them and the fact that they were a retainer, their lord’s possession, was etched in a place close to their vitals.

However, that girl had placed this man’s “name” on his left hand, an extremity. To any demon lord or retainer of one, it would be utterly obvious just how deep the trust was between these two.

Even while thinking all that, when she saw the “name” engraved there, she was more than a little surprised. Seeing that nostalgic name in such an unexpected place, her expression shook, even though she had grown accustomed to hiding how she felt.

There was no helping that. After all, she had only allowed herself to show her feelings, to be herself, in front of that person.

“You have been my hope all this time. In that noble girl’s future, I saw the results that I sought... And at the end, I met you.”

This young man possessed the same name. The same exact name as that man, who she would never be able to meet again. What a wonderful thing.

“This is my final prophecy: You will see the girl soon.”

She wanted them to be happy. It had only been for a short time, but she herself had certainly been happy.

She wished her daughters would be happy, and felt truly blessed to be able to devote herself to that purpose.

The power drained from her body and she became unable to hold herself up, but the young man caught her before she hit the ground. Feeling the strength of his arms, she was a little surprised, but a smile also crossed her face.

His appearance and the colors about him, and even his race, were all utterly different. And that man’s arms hadn’t been so strong. But even so, she still somehow understood. Her daughter had fallen for a man similar to the one she herself had chosen.

A kind person.

This youth was a good man, just like that man, who had been kinder than anyone else.

That girl would surely be fine now. And so would her other daughter.

Ever since they were born, those girls hadn’t been alone. They would surely be able to walk a path in which they shared their heavy burdens and suffering, and support one another. And surely, the fact that they hadn’t been born alone had been the greatest blessing for those girls.

So—

I suppose it is fine now...

She had tried. She'd really, truly tried her hardest.

Ever since that person who would listen to her complaints was gone, she had endured a great deal. Ever since that man who would call her by her name had gone, she was only ever called by the title of "Purple Lady Oracle."

Because she wanted to protect the daughters he had left behind, and to fulfill her promise to him, she had tried her hardest.

I hope you'll praise me...

And so, just like when she was little, she felt arms hug her tight, and heard a gentle voice say, "You really tried hard, Mov."

Even if the voice she had heard was just an illusion, she felt she had been rewarded for everything.

"Thank you... Smaragdi..."

And with that, her consciousness completely faded away into light.

†

As he hugged her tight, Latina called out, "Dale?" in a flustered voice.

"Ah... I made you recall some painful memories. Sorry."

Realizing that those words of apology were meant to comfort her, a gentle smile crossed Latina's face. She cuddled up against Dale like a kitten.

"That time back when I was a child had just been too frightening and painful, so I hadn't even been able to remember," Latina said while bringing her fingers together, as if in prayer. To her, Dale's embrace was the place that she felt the most at ease in the world. When she was young she had felt like she'd been denied by the entire world, but he had surrounded her with great love like this and made her feel relieved.

That hadn't changed, even now.

That she didn't doubt the deep love her parents had for her, and she knew now that she was loved, all because this place where she felt safe had remained firmly there for her.

As Latina would always say, she truly felt that meeting Dale at that time and being saved was the greatest bit of fortune in her life. She felt blessed, thinking that it was precisely because Dale had given her a love that was a little different than what her parents had given her, but was no weaker, that the current her existed.

And so, a smile remained on her face.

"I understand fully now. My parents really did care about me. They really did wish for me... for Chrysos and me, to be happy..."

Even now, Latina didn't fully understand the nature of the

prophecy that she would bring about a disaster. She knew that prophecy was the reason she was exiled from their her old home as a criminal.

Even so, she thought...

"I'm happy. Right now, I'm really happy, so... I'm able to properly remember my parents now. I'm able to realize I was happy back then now, too."

It was precisely because that happiness had been so precious to her that it had hurt so much to lose it. It had been too painful to even remember. But as she was now, Latina could accept even those memories.

That passage of time caused bitter memories to fade, but it also caused those memories you didn't want to forget to fade.

"I'm glad I could remember... so that I didn't forget."

Her parents existed within those happy memories. She didn't want to forget that. And she also wanted to give her all to being happy from now on.

That was how she would respond to the wishes of her parents, who wanted their children to be happier more than themselves. While Latina thought such things, Dale gently stroked her hair.

Sensing that Dale, who she wanted to understand her thoughts more than anyone else, had affirmed her feelings, Latina stayed leaned up against him as she closed her eyes with a gentle expression on her face.

The Event on New Year's Eve, and a Chance Meeting in a Dream

It began with the approach of the new year, the first since Latina had come to Kreuz. In not only Laband where Kreuz lay, but also many other places, the eve of the new year was called the "Holy Night."

On the Holy Night, families and those close to them would hold a feast and welcome the new year inside their homes, recounting tales of the year that had just passed.

It was said that those who endeavored to do good throughout the year were also visited by an Ahmar apostle clad in red sheets and granted a blessing.

Each house placed a charm provided by the temple on their door, to prevent bad things from coming inside. Originally they were simple charms, rings made of plants, but over the years they had grown more richly ornamented, and now they had the brilliant coloration of the year end festivities about them.

Furthermore, there was one more story surrounding the Holy Night.

"You mustn't go outside on the Holy Night. On that night alone, magical beings appear even in town."

"Magical beings will show up in Kreuz, too?!" the young Latina responded, looking surprised upon hearing that from Dale.

"Did they not show up back where you came from? Well, they hardly showed up back in my home village out in the country... In towns like this, though, the Holy Night is the one and only time that undead monsters will appear."

"Undead?"

"That's right. Undead in black clothes come after bad children who go out to play at night, and those who won't listen to their parents... Hey, Latina, you don't have to get so scared!"

As Dale had continued to talk, Latina's face had gone completely pale and she was left sobbing, unable to even talk.

To Dale, children being told that "if you aren't a good kid, the apostle won't come and you'll be taken away by magical beings" was an utterly cliché story. He hadn't imagined that it would scare her this greatly.

Of course, Latina was this scared thanks to her childhood trauma.

The memory of the incident in which her mother had tossed her into a graveyard remained all too fresh.

“It’s alright! It’s true that magical beings appear, but they won’t enter houses that have charms on them, so on the Holy Night, you’ll be fine just as long as you make sure to get home early!”

“Magical beings won’t come to where Latina is?”

“If they went out of their way to come after even a good kid like you, then all the kids in Kreuz would be wiped out!”

Dale had chosen his words poorly.

In her old home, she had been declared the greatest of criminals by those around her. And so, she now grew more and more pale.

“Everyone in Kreuz’ll be attacked?!”

“They won’t!”

As a result, despite Dale’s intentions, Latina had come to think of the Holy Night as something terrifying.

The monsters that appeared solely on the Holy Night were called Hell Black Santas, and were known to surround the living while chanting mysterious curses like “Drop d34d yu b4st4rds with 4 lyfe” and “H8 y4, j3rks w/liv3s.”

They were truly mysterious curses.

It was said that they were originally just harmless ghosts, nothing but residual thoughts, but had been changed by encountering a being called the “king” that existed somewhere in this world, giving them a new sense of values.

It was thought that they only appeared once annually because they let their grudges build up over the course of the year. They used that power to infringe upon towns. Though with that said, the damages caused by these magical beings were limited to causing children trauma and making them cry, and getting in the way of secret rendezvous between lovers. It was truly dull mischief when compared to the power they possessed.

They didn’t directly cause any significant damage. Therefore, no towns directed significant effort towards eliminating them. And by the way, even if one succeeded in wiping them out, the same sort of outbreak would occur again years later.

Taking all of that into consideration, the elites in charge of town decided it was far more logical to simply have everyone place charms on their houses and wait inside for the night.

Even though Latina hated undead monsters more than anyone, the following year she ended up surrounded by Hell Black Santas. The cause was a plan constructed by her friends for a “grand adventure.”

They intended to slip out of their homes and get a look at the magical beings.

At times, children wanted to rebel against what the adults told

them they couldn't do, in order to have a modest adventure. Furthermore, the kids felt an irresistible allure to the idea of magical beings, which they had only heard of in stories. It wasn't as if they were heading off out of town to some unknown place. They just were going to take a peek at what things were like out in town. It surely wasn't as dangerous as the adults had said.

If any adults overheard, they would surely put a stop to a plan so filled with holes, but the children didn't realize any of that. And that was also something that most adults had experienced when they were children.

The damage ultimately was limited to the crying of children. With that said, it should be clear that each year there were kids who ended up sobbing.

When Latina heard her friends discussing the matter in school, she tried to stop them.

She was a good kid who listened to what Dale and Kenneth told her, hardly ever playing pranks or acting belligerent. And above all else, she was scared of ghosts. So, she faced her friends and said, "We shouldn't. It's dangerous, not being in our houses."

"Are you scared of monsters, Latina?" Chloe asked in concern, seeing that her friend had gone pale. That caused Latina to feel a little bit relieved. Her best friend would never pressure her. Surely with this, they'd rethink things.

"You don't need to push yourself, Latina."

"Wah?"

Her friend's reaction wasn't quite what Latina had expected. After Chloe gave Latina a brilliant smile that was just like her, she turned to face their other friends.

"Well then, Latina won't be coming along this time, so it'll just be us!"

"Wah!"

She hadn't managed to stop them. The gears in Latina's head spun wildly, trying to think of what to do. Her friends would head out and explore town even without her accompanying them. The thought of her friends running into magical beings in some place unknown to her and facing danger... The very idea made it feel like all the blood in her veins had turned to ice.

"Latina will go too!" she yelled out before she even realized it.

"Will you be alright, Latina?"

"Latina doesn't know if she'll be fine or not... but she's going too!"

As a magic user, Latina was more capable of protecting herself than her friends. Rather than let her friends face danger all on the own, she'd prefer to be able to act as a shield for them if push came to shove. That was the conclusion she had reached.

And as a result of that decision...

By nature, the Hell Black Santas wandered around town. That meant that depending on the circumstances, it was possible they wouldn't encounter them.

At first, they indeed didn't run into any Hell Black Santas. But while wandering aimlessly about town, they turned a certain corner and unexpectedly encountered their first one. Trying to run away in their surprise was the proper reaction, but before they realized it, the number of them squirming about had increased. Amongst the adults it was said that by the time you saw one thirty would gather, but the children had no way of knowing that.

They were blocked off from the lighter areas and were steadily driven down gloomier alleys. It was impossible to read the expression of those undead monsters, but they somehow seemed to be greatly enjoying chasing after these terrified children.

In actuality, children who made such good reactions were a favorite "dish" for the Santas. It could be said that was what they lived for, even though they were dead.

That was why the Santas had gathered en masse, but it would be cruel to tell the children that.

The children, now scared and hiding while trying to come up with a plan, had never expected to run into this many magical beings.

"What'll we do?!" Marcel shrieked, only for Rudy to instantly cover his mouth.

"Not so loud! They'll find us!" Rudy said, looking pale himself. Beside him, Anthony sat silently, thinking frantically.

Latina held her best friend Chloe's hand tightly. While sobbing and trembling, she looked straight at Chloe.

"Latina will buy time... you all run away."

"Latina?"

"Latina has never used purification magic, but she knows enough to keep them from going after everyone, so please run to the Ocelot while she does so," she said with a look of determination on her face, then took off before her friends could stop her.

"Oh light of heaven, grant this request. Grant peace to these lost souls. Oh light of heaven, grant this request. Grant peace to these confused, unrestful souls."

What Latina was chanting wasn't proper purification magic. The magic her young self could manage was limited to healing magic, protective wall magic, temperature change magic, and one type of attack magic.

What Latina chanted was a majestic song for the repose of souls that her mother had performed occasionally during ceremonies back

in the great temple. Latina and her twin sister had secretly peeked in on it, and their mother had just looked so impressive that they mimicked her together over and over until they had it completely memorized.

Latina desperately raised her voice as she continued to chant.

The Hell Black Santas stopped in their tracks. It lacked the power needed to forcefully purify them, but her words were in the devil language, the same one used for casting magic. With a trace of mana added, it had enough power to keep those incorporeal beings at a distance.

“Acry1ng l17713 g1rlso mo3!”

“Y3sth47 l0l1t4, d0n0t 70ucH”

The Santas’ voices sounded more like shouts of joy than curses, but in her panic Latina didn’t notice that.

After seeing Latina like that, Chloe bit her lip, turned around, and then ran in the other direction.

“Chloe?! We’re leaving Latina behind?!”

“We’ve got to go get help, for Latina’s sake too! And every second counts!” Chloe said, running at full speed.

Just like Latina had said, there would be plenty of folks who deal with undead monsters at the Dancing Ocelot. She didn’t want to have people angry at her, but at this point, she had no other choice. With that thought in her mind, Chloe desperately ran.

Latina was also giving her all for that best friend of hers. For a magical being hater like Latina, being surrounded by undead monsters was so terrifying an experience that words couldn’t even express it. Just facing off against them was enough to make her legs quake, and she didn’t seem to be able to move properly.

Even so, she tried to ignore that, to not think about it. If she did, her tongue would grow stiff and she would lose the ability to keep chanting. Latina was desperately encouraging herself to keep trying, but quite regrettably for her...

She was a beautiful young girl courageously raising her voice with tears in her eyes. Her adorable face warped with terror, holding back her trembling while resolutely chanting on.

Her trying so terribly hard had only gathered her more of a crowd.

However, her efforts were rewarded.

“Are you the ones who made Latina cry...? You’re the ones who made my little girl sob...?”

That low voice sounded like it had come from the depths of hell, but as soon as she heard it come from behind, that was the signal that everything was over. That voice was full of bloodlust and anger, but Latina didn’t fear it at all, instead breaking down in tears of relief.

“Dale!”

“Latina... You all don’t think you’ll get off lightly for this, do you...?”

His hands were gentle as he stroked Latina and held her tight to calm the crying girl, but his tone and expression were enough overpower even those undead monsters.

He was completely enraged.

While facing the overwhelmed Hell Black Santas, who somehow looked prepared to flee, Dale had the appearance of an envoy of hell.

The fundamental method of dealing with undead monsters was to use magic. Furthermore, it was limited to magic of the Holy and Dark attributes. It wasn’t as if there were no methods based on divine protection, but those weren’t the normal means.

The Holy element magic guided the opponent, purifying them by showing them the way. In other words, it accomplished its goals by saving lost souls, the complete opposite approach to the Dark magic method.

As the Dark attribute also employed necromancy, its method of exorcising the undead was akin to using power to beat them to a bloody pulp.

Dale’s only attribute for dealing with the undead was already Dark to start with, but even if he could use Holy magic too, he would have taken the same approach.

Dale imbued both of his fists with Dark magic. In other words, he literally brawled with undead monsters. He grabbed, hit, and knocked down the mass of Hell Black Santas. There wasn’t even a shred of mercy to his expression as he mounted one of them and kept on pummeling. His opponents were magical beings, so there was no need for such things. That’s what he would later say with a smile on his face.

The regular rhythm of the dull sound of his blows filled the Kreuz night.

After a little while, Dale turned around, no longer a shred of the harshness he had about him when facing the Santas. At first he intended to have the girl who was seated with trembling shoulders stand, but soon after looking at her, he moved to pick her up in his arms instead.

“Are you alright, Latina?” Dale asked, seeming as if all the tension had drained from his body. Latina started sobbing loudly. Rather than hesitating, he gave a strained smile and hugged her tight.

It was thanks to Chloe that Dale had made it to Latina. She had had her friends stop at key points along the way. It was dark, and they were terrified, not knowing when magical beings may attack, but when she mentioned Latina, who was struggling all on her own, they

couldn't do anything but agree to her plan. On top of that, she had rushed into the Ocelot by herself, where there was a great commotion because they had realized Latina's absence.

With that notification from Chloe Dale went running, and was led by their other friends along the way until he made it to Latina.

Around now, Kenneth was surely escorting Latina's friends back home. They'd have to all be prepared for a scolding back in their own homes.

Dale had intended to lecture Latina as well, but he couldn't bring himself to do so when she was in such a state.

"Latina's sorry, Latina's sorry...!"

Before he could scold her, Latina had realized her mistake and was repeating words of apology. On top of that, when faced with a Latina who had suffered such a terrifying experience, Dale had no choice but to comfort her.

"You had me worried. I'm really glad that you're alright, Latina. You won't do anything like this again, right?"

"Latina won't...! Latina's sorry, Dale. She's sorry..."

"...was it scary? I'm sorry I got there so late."

"Dale... Latina's sorry, for being a bad girl...!"

"You're not a bad girl... though I think you could stand to act up a little bit more. I just want you to remember that I worry about you because you're so precious to me, Latina."

Furthermore, Dale felt truly relieved to see that Latina now felt willing to show some selfishness or get into mischief, at least a little. She was just too much of a good girl by nature. He didn't want to see her walking around on eggshells around him and everyone else, looking like she was searching for the place she belonged while trying to hold her breath. No matter how good of a kid one may be, they grew while doing the sort of things that adults would scold them for. And it was a guardian's role to forgive a child for their mistakes, as long as it wasn't something that couldn't be undone. If they screwed up, then they just had to do better next time.

"Kenneth prepared a feast and a cake for the Holy Night festivities. He found it strange that you didn't come down to help, so he went looking for you."

"...Latina's sorry."

"Well, we'll just have to give it our all so that the apostle comes next year, right?" he said while walking along with her in his arms. As his breath turned white and drifted upwards into the night sky, small snowflakes came fluttering down.

On a certain year, Dale thought back on those events.

Ever since then, it had been Latina's role to place charms on the front and rear doors to the Ocelot. She made sure they were firmly in

place, taking extra special care to make sure nothing could get inside. Immediately after doing so, she turned and looked at Dale with an unusually serious look on her face.

“Dale.”

“What is it?”

“I was thinking of going outside tonight.”

“Huh?” Dale said in an astonished voice. That was because ever since that night, she not only wouldn’t go outside after the sun went down on the eve of the new year, she wouldn’t even go near the door.

Just what sort of sudden change of heart was this?

“Why would you do something like that...?”

“I’m bad with such things, so I want to overcome that! And Chrysos was also saying how purification magic was one of her strong points now!”

...So it wasn’t just Latina, Dale thought to himself.

Latina had been fired up to learn anti-undead magic because she was so afraid of them and wanted a means to deal with them, and apparently things were similar for her sister. Their difficulty in dealing with the undead was apparently the result of trauma shared by both twins.

Of course, Chrysos’s hatred of the undead, just like Latina’s, was rooted in the terrifying experience of being tossed into the graveyard.

“I can use not only Holy magic, but also Dark magic as well, allowing me to master anti-undead magic,” Chrysos had declared with a serious expression. In a way, she had followed her mother’s teachings and conquered her trauma by facing it head on. (Nobody dared touch on the fact that more than conquering it, she had used over-excessive self-defense on even nearly harmless low-grade spirits, unleashing powerful magic upon them.)

“I also had Lady Rose teach me purification magic, so it shouldn’t turn out like before, but I’d still be uneasy on my own...”

“Then you don’t have to go out of your way to do this...”

“But it would be even more frightening to not be able to use it if something happened, so I want to practice.”

That statement wasn’t all that positive. Apparently Latina’s path towards overcoming her fear of the undead remained a long one.

But now that I think about it...

It would be difficult to head out to a graveyard or underground labyrinth for the express purpose of magic practice, and it would be far too heavy a load for a scaredy cat like Latina anyway.

And this time, rather than running off on her own, she was asking him to accompany her. As long as he was by her side, even on the off chance that something happened, he wouldn’t let her face any danger.

“If you happened to run into any undead when I wasn’t around...

that'd be a real issue..."

"I may be able to chant the spell, but I won't be able to feel peace of mind until I do it for real."

"I see."

Dale gave a nod, having come to a conclusion. Even if Latina faced a frightening experience at the hands of the undead, it would earn him the side benefit getting to pamper her even more than normal. And so, everything seemed alright in terms of potential results.

"You won't push yourself too hard, right?"

"Yeah."

Having finished discussing the matter, the two of them ended up going out for a walk that night.

She had said that she would try her hardest, but Latina was apparently still terrified and getting cold feet. She gripped Dale's hand tightly, and drew even closer to him than normal as she walked together through town.

That time, which felt warm and passionate in spite of the winter cold, came to an end with them encountering even more Santas than Dale had expected. Seeing the undead continue to utter their curses, Latina hid behind Dale's back with tears in her eyes. The curses grew even louder, but remained incomprehensible.

Though she was hiding behind Dale's back, she was chanting a spell. It successfully activated, and several Santas vanished. Seeing that Latina felt relieved, and moved out in front of Dale. For whatever reason, the Santas wouldn't come within a set distance. Latina cast magic once again. The number of Santas was clearly decreasing.

Latina didn't understand the reason behind the Santas' actions, but they were clearly afraid of the bloodlust emanating from Dale. That most terrifying of heroes who was a demon lord's retainer was already far outside the realm of common sense. In a way, he was an even more vicious presence than a magical being.

"I did it...!"

"Yeah. You really did your best, Latina."

Dale stroked the victorious Latina's head he had when she was little, praising her for her success in battle.

They were near the Ocelot, but it would still be a serious matter if she were to run out of mana and collapse. When Dale sensed that was about to occur, they returned back to the Ocelot at his insistence.

So, this is a dream.

He clearly remembered getting into bed with Latina after that. They didn't make out or anything. Dale simply hugged the still frightened Latina tight, pampering her like he had when she was young and returning to something resembling his old doting idiot

mode.

He recalled falling asleep, so the scenery he saw now was clearly within a dream.

While reaching that conclusion, Dale thought to himself, *A situation in which I'm going to introduce myself to Latina's parents... that should be just plain impossible!*

Even though he knew it was a dream, his palms were still drenched in sweat. And the girl with a wide grin on her face by his side was also adorable, even within a dream.

Dale wasn't aware of the common lifestyle in Vassilios. And yet, he found himself walking through an unfamiliar orderly town, being led by Latina. While walking the stone path, he took a sidelong glance and saw houses made from white-looking bricks, bleached by being exposed to strong sunlight. After turning at countless corners, they entered an area that had a bit of a rougher feel to it. Latina stopped in front of one house in the area, a plain, simple one made of sun-dried bricks.

Latina's parents were inside. With the sort of confidence in that fact characteristic of being in a dream, Dale was sweating bullets.

What's with this feeling of nervousness, even though I know I'm in a dream...?!

His whole body felt stiff. It wouldn't move like he wanted.

While Dale was unable to even call to mind how he should announce his arrival, the simple door opened without notice.

"Oh, so you can also show an appearance resembling a normal person, displaying your nervousness?"

It was Chrysos who suddenly poked her face out from inside the building. Seeing the state Dale was in, she gave a cruel smile.

"Your remarks towards me are as awful as always."

"Now, you may come inside. Rag and Mov are waiting."

While it would normally be unthinkable for the ruler of a nation to greet him at the door, Dale accepted the circumstances and came inside as he was beckoned to do.

As he stepped into the shade, the brightness abated, and the heat he was feeling dropped a bit. As if trying to calm his feelings as well, he unconsciously took several deep breaths.

"Ugh..."

"Are you really that nervous?"

"Well... you know."

Latina tilted her head and looked at Dale, whose expression had grown stiff.

"Latina, you also... well, I guess the circumstances weren't the same back then..."

When Latina visited Dale's home village, she was so young that

the topic of marriage didn't come up at all. There was no helping that, though, as Dale wasn't even thinking of Latina in that way back then. Latina may have been in love with Dale, but her meeting with his family didn't have that sort of feel to it. She was just so young that she hadn't really felt anything but the nervousness of being in a new place for the first time.

The circumstances Dale faced now, reporting to her family on their intent to marry (or rather, ask their forgiveness), were completely different.

Completely indifferent to Dale's hesitation, Chrysos pointed to a room further in. Latina gave a slightly troubled smile, but even so led Dale into the room by hand.

Dale stood petrified upon seeing a man with hair the same platinum color as Latina and Chrysos's. From his weak-kneed attitude, it was hard to imagine he was the hero who had defeated numerous demon lords.

The man gently smiled, not ridiculing Dale for that in the least.

"Perhaps it's a little strange to say 'nice to meet you.' It's my first time meeting someone in this way, after all."

The man's green eyes were a color reminiscent of gentle, fresh leaves, and he possessed horns like elegant black precious stones, which Latina had inherited.

This man, Smaragdi, who Dale had only met after he was no longer amongst the living, was Latina and Chrysos's father.

This is scarier than facing off against any demon lord...!

That was how Dale earnestly felt at the moment.

The man before him now didn't have a very flashy appearance considering he was the father of Latina and Chrysos. He had the look of a gentle intellectual about him, but there wasn't any conventional beauty to him.

When Dale had met him, a good deal of time had passed since his death, so he no longer had the appearance he had possessed when he was alive. It could be said that this was Dale's first time seeing the man's face.

There wasn't any harshness to the man smiling before him now.

But perhaps because he was so worked up at the moment, Dale couldn't simply accept his friendly attitude.

"...Nice to meet you, I'm..."

"Rag!"

The instant Dale had pulled himself together and tried to introduce himself, Latina went running up to the man. She hugged him tight and happily closed her hands.

Devils spent a long period of time as adults, so there wasn't a visible age difference between Latina and her father.

Even so, Dale didn't feel any jealousy at seeing him pamper Latina.

"Oh, so you are unperturbed?" Chrysos asked with a grin.

"Just exactly what sort of person do you think I am...?" Dale replied with a sigh.

It was no surprise that Dale would be thought of as an incarnation of jealousy considering his words and actions, but he was aware of just how dearly Latina had missed her father. He accepted that it was only natural for him to dote on her after they finally reunited.

"Rag, I'm happy now."

"Right. Seeing the way that you can truly smile now, I can tell that you mean that from the bottom of your heart... You've really worked hard, Latina."

Latina was wiping tears from her eyes, but she still wore a happy smile as her father stroked her hair. And seeing his daughter like that, Smaragdi also looked truly glad.

Sensing the resemblance in Smaragdi's gentle voice and smile, Dale thought to himself how this man truly was Latina's father.

"That's also because you watched over her with affection, right? I'm truly grateful to you for saving my daughter," he said, thanking Dale with a gentle smile on his face.

The second he heard that, Dale felt ashamed at letting his nervousness get the better of his manners. He immediately adjusted his posture and expression and looked straight at Smaragdi.

"My sincerest apologies for being so late in introducing myself. My name is Dale Reki. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"I'm Smaragdi... You humans have a name that indicates your family too, right? The closest thing devils have is a custom to employ our mother's name to indicate whose child we are, but... Our race does not have as close relationships to our children as humans do."

Dale could sense from Smaragdi's clear explanation that he was skilled at teaching others. Despite his youthful appearance he had the feel of the respected teacher from back in Dale's home village about him, so Dale maintained his proper posture.

"You don't need to be so nervous..." Latina said while tilting her head. She was in the midst of laying out the baked sweets she had brought as a gift atop the table.

A woman with long purple hair who Dale was acquainted with was staring straight at Latina as she did so. She didn't even so much as blink while observing the sweets laid out in front of her. She seemed satisfied after a bit and so reached out slowly, then took a nibble out of the corner. Then, she silently chewed, looking reminiscent of a small animal.

When Dale had met her before she gave off a dignified, resolute

impression, but seeing her nibble away at the madeline she was holding in both hands was very much reminiscent of Latina. Perhaps that impression was unnecessarily strengthened by the flower in her loosely done up purple hair.

After she finished the first one, her golden eyes remained fixed on the tray left in the middle of the table. With a strained laugh Chrysos took a new sweet from there and placed it in front of her mother. The woman took the offered sweet in both hands without hesitation, and started once more nibbling at it.

After watching that chain of events, Dale then turned to face Chrysos.

“...Hey, Chrysos.”

“What is it?”

“My first impression was that Latina took after your father, while you took after your mother... but is it the opposite?”

“Platina was often told that she resembled Mov.”

“Sure enough...”

Latina tilted her head while listening to this conversation between Dale and her sister. Apparently she herself had no awareness of that fact.

Still... I was prepared to be greeted with more open hostility...

Smaragdi had a far more friendly, gentle feel about him than Dale had expected.

I was at least expecting to be told, “I won’t let some mere hero who’s only taken down a few demon lords have my daughter!” I would’ve said it...

Even perusing the annals of history, Dale would still be the first to wipe out nearly all of the demon lords. That was no ordinary feat.

Dale only thought that to himself, not speaking aloud, but Smaragdi smiled and seemed to reply to Dale’s question. “Well, if you had happened to do something unreasonable or unjust to my innocent Latina... I would use any methods needed to drag you down here to the underworld,” he said, the smile remaining on his face as he made such a nasty statement without hesitation.

“Before you desired Latina, she desired you, after all.”

It felt like the temperature in the room had dropped. Neither his smile nor the tone of his voice changed, but even a storied hero like Dale felt the pressure he exuded.

“And there’s no way anyone could give my adorable Platina the cold shoulder.”

“I’m in absolute agreement,” Dale immediately responded.

That’s right. More than the matter of Dale himself, that girl who he held more precious than anyone having her first love unfulfilled, or in other words having her heart broken, was something that must

never be allowed to occur.

Anyone insolent enough to do so would be deserving of a taste of the tortures of Hell.

With such contradictory thoughts, Dale's thinking had reached its worst.

"If you let Platina suffer misfortune in the future, then don't go expecting to live to the peaceful natural end of your life."

Dale reflexively thought that he'd end up cursed.

He may have been an extraordinary hero, but the methods needed to guard against an attack from that angle fell outside of his field of expertise. Dale was technically a priest, but it wasn't as if the divine power related to Quirmizi was effective against the undead.

And besides, Dale figured this man would easily bypass any such hindrances in order to curse him anyway.

"...I'll give it my all."

"I'd be grateful if you did so," Smaragdi said with a smile, seeing Dale's stiffened expression.



“Platina would surely say that she’d never be happy if she wasn’t with you. That girl’s stubborn like her parents, after all.”

Mov had been nibbling away at her madeline the entire time that Dale and Smaragdi were having that conversation, but she now gulped down the contents of her mouth and looked at Dale.

“Do you wish to know whether it shall be a boy or a girl when you eventually have a child?”

It was a sudden question, coming out of nowhere.

Latina’s cheeks flushed bright red.

“Just your words that one will be born eventually is enough,” Dale responded with a slightly strained smile.

“I see.”

The words of a rare oracle of Banafsaj were more valuable than gold. Devils were a race for which it was difficult to have children, but as long as they had those words on their side, they could wait as long as it took. And besides, they’d have plenty of time from now on, anyway.

Mov smiled at Dale’s response, and then elegantly brought the tea Latina had prepared to her lips. She looked like a different person than the one who had been acting so childish before. Not even trying to hide that dual nature of hers, she gave a calm smile and then cuddled up close to Smaragdi. Smaragdi looked back at her with a gentle expression that was different than the one he directed towards his daughters. The man reached out his slender fingers and casually readjusted the flower in her hair.

Dale felt he understood the fact that Latina was raised with love by these parents.

“I’ll keep on protecting Latina.”

“...If you could keep an eye out for Chrysos too, I’d appreciate it. That girl has her head on straight, but she still has some parts about her that resemble her mother...”

While speaking those words out of concern for his other daughter, Smaragdi gave a slightly troubled looking smile.

That was the last sight that Dale saw.



“Ugh...” Dale let out something like a groan into the still-dark room.

I lost sight of the fact that it was a dream somewhere midway through...

Dreams were often that way, but he couldn’t just write it off as a simple dream.

“I should take Latina for a visit to his grave...”

He also thought that he'd like to ask Chrysos's opinion first, but he thought he should at least return her father's remains to his old home rather than leaving them in that forest. And he also thought that he would get in contact with Gregor, who had the cleanup for the incident with the Second Demon Lord thrust upon him, so that Latina's parents could be buried together, as they seemed so happy together in the dream.

"Hngh..."

Before all that, though, he wrapped up the girl sleeping soundly by his side in his arms. The strange, irregular sound of her breathing as she slept caused him to break out in a smile.

"I'll do my best to make sure she experiences plenty of happiness," Dale whispered, stating his aspirations to the sleeping Latina, and then he shut his eyes.

Latina awoke after a short while and tried to get up, only to find herself in a tight grasp. Dale enjoyed her squirming about, so he feigned still being asleep.

That was all so that he could exchange greetings for the new year with her before anyone else.

Dale entered into the new year enjoying the warmth of that beloved girl and looking forward to saying, "I look forward to spending the next year with you, too."

Afterword

“Huh? Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

Strangely, I’ve found myself having this exchange a lot more lately.

For most of you, this is probably our first time meeting. I’m CHIROLU, and I’d like to sincerely thank you for picking up this work, the sixth volume of *If It’s for My Daughter, I’d Even Defeat a Demon Lord*.

This sixth volume has gone on sale alongside a special edition that comes with a drama CD, and the second edition of the manga has also hit store shelves. When I heard this work would be adapted to a drama CD and manga, the first thing I did was voice my doubt. Of course I was also grateful and overjoyed, but it’s just in my nature to be suspicious, it seems. I can never be too careful, to a degree that it’s in excess... though I suppose that’s a somewhat strange self-analysis. There are many parts of me that just live on pure instinct, after all.

There are also translations in progress for several countries, and by the time this volume is on sale, I believe I should have already had my first experience being invited abroad as an author. That may have been the point when I couldn’t help but think, “Just what in the world is going on...?” Considering my level of popularity within the country, it’s not something I ever could have expected. Here and now, I’m reaching a point where I can’t help but look off into the distance and think, “You really never know what’ll happen in life...”

Still, I really never thought “For my Daughter” would get this big when I started writing it for a corner of the web. To think that the story has continued on this long... those words are filled with gratitude, but they also make it sound like this is the final volume, so I’ll cut those thoughts off here. I hope that you’ll follow along with the story just a little longer, not mentioning the fact that, “she’s not really his ‘daughter’ anymore.”

Thank you so much to everyone who helped make this book a reality. You managed to draw a wonderful “daughter” even without a fixed heroine and with a shifting setting, Kei. And more than anything else, to those of you who chose this book out of so many options, you have my deepest gratitude.

As long as this book brought you at least a little joy, then I’ll feel

truly blessed.

August 2017,
CHIROLU

Bonus Short Story

The Little Girl Starts Keeping a Diary

The one in charge of the paperwork and accounting for the Dancing Ocelot was the proprietress, Rita. It wasn't that such matters were thrust on her because she had been the daughter of the business's former owners, but because she was absolutely the right person for the job. The cooking and cleaning aspect of running a bar and inn were more Kenneth's forte. He carried out such tasks every day with a skill that made it hard to imagine that his previous job was as an adventurer wielding heavy weapons.

Rita also dealt with customers in the shop's capacity as a "branch" of the temple of Akhdar, so her usual position was on the inside of the counter, where she could deal with such matters.

When Latina was still young, one of her common places to play was a seat at the counter, where she could see Rita working. She could often be seen there with picture books and other children's books laid out in front of her.

On that day, Latina stared with great interest as Rita wrote in her account book.

"There's a lot of numbers."

"Yeah, there are."

"At school, Latina is studying math."

"I see. Is it tricky?"

"A bit, but if Latina doesn't rush, she's alright."

It was easy to imagine this girl looking incredibly serious as she tackled her math problems. Rita found the thought charming, and gave a little laugh.

"Is school fun?"

"Yeah. And Latina has made friends, too."

Latina's smile was absolutely adorable as she replied, causing Rita to feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

"Rita, why do you write in that 'account book'?"

"That's a little hard to answer... To manage our income and expenditures, and keep an eye on our stock... Right, well, to put it simply, so that we know what happened, even later on."

“Even later on?”

“It’s hard to remember everything that happened every single day, isn’t it? So I keep a record. That’s how diaries work too, right?”

“Diaries?”

Hearing that word that Rita had brought up to explain, Latina tilted her head.

“What’s a diary?”

“Ah, Dale doesn’t make a habit of keeping one, does he...? So you’ve never heard of a diary, huh?”

Knowing the environment Latina lived in, Rita soon understood the reason why.

“Diaries, you see, are things where you write down what happened each day. How you played, and what you studied, and whatever else you want. There are people who write down the weather, too.”

“Anything?”

“Right. There’s no rules to it, so you can write about anything.”

Seeing how Latina seemed to have an interest in the matter, Rita smiled and then gave one suggestion.

“However, you’ll be using it for a long time, so it may be better to use something nicer than a usual notebook.”

“Really?”

“And also, for the same reason, you should pick something that suits your tastes. Should I go with you to purchase one? Dale and Kenneth only ever go to shops that are purely practical, after all. Latina, you like cute things, right?”

Latina looked a little nervous in response to Rita’s proposal, but still gave a nod.

When Rita brought her to a general store the next day, Latina looked truly surprised.

“Woooooow...”

Latina only knew the shops that Kenneth and Dale had brought her to, so it was apparently a shock for her to see one that focused on interior design and displays. Then again, it would be a problem in and of itself if Dale or Kenneth were well acquainted with this kind of sugary sweet shop, full of frill and lace, and ribbons and artificial flowers of all sorts of colors.

Latina glanced all around the shop, only for her gaze to stop on a mirror with a small drawer portion, with the design of a white flower growing up out of the earth about it.

“So pretty...”

“Oh, my, it certainly is cute. Now that I think of it, do you and Dale have a mirror in your room?”

“No,” Latina responded, shaking her head from side to side. Dale

doted on Latina so much each and every day, but as a man, he didn't pay enough attention to such fine details at times.

"Well then, let's buy it and take it back with us. Us girls need a mirror to take care of our personal grooming, after all."

"Is that alright?"

"It's fine. When it's something you need, it's not frivolous spending, it's a necessary expenditure."

Rita gave the reserved young girl with her a wink, called for an employee, and had them pack up the mirror Latina had chosen.

That night, Latina opened up her new red cloth covered notebook. Latina was fond of light colors, but since she would be using it as a diary, after talking it over with Rita, she decided on a darker color where dirt and stains wouldn't show as easily. The practical nature of both Rita and the young girl was reflected in that decision.

With that said, though, the detailed little floral pattern on the cover had captured Latina's eye and appealed to her even at first glance. She also liked the spine, which used a different color and was made of a plain cloth, making the whole notebook something that she enjoyed even just looking at.

"Um..."

And finally, she decided what to write on the very first page of her diary. Which was to say, she wrote about the treasure she had received today.

She had left it in front of her desk, and saw her joyful face reflected in it. She then got to thinking on how to best write out those feelings on this fresh page of the other treasure she had received.



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If It's for My Daughter, I'd Even Defeat a Demon Lord: Volume 6
by CHIROLU

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